

FRIENDS OF PRIORY PARK & GREEN

A.G.M. 2004

The Annual General Meeting took place on the 12th March 2004 at Priory Junior School. Approximately 60 people attended.

APOLOGIES were received from Ross Cranston MP, Mr. & Mrs. Austin Mr. & Mrs. Ditano, Miss Bailey, Miss Mullett, Mr. & Mrs. Shakespeare, Mr. & Mrs. P. Blachford, Mr. & Mrs. Beddal, Margaret Allen, Olga Griffiths, Julie Banner

Minutes of A.G.M. 2003 accepted and approved by Sally Johnson and Janet Prince

1. ANNUAL REPORT

The outgoing Chairperson Mr. Arthur Weston gave the Annual Report, saying that FOPP's second year had been an outstanding success. Many partnerships had been forged throughout the year and those partnerships had helped deliver successful events enjoyed by the community, in particular the cooperation of St Francis Youth Club and the Community Association.

Much of our time was taken up by the campaign to fight Dudley College and Dudley Council in their proposal to turn Priory Hall into the "That Academy", which when finally made public were unacceptable to our membership, as demonstrated by the 2000 plus petition presented to the CAC in this hall. After a lot of hard work and heartache our efforts helped finally in the abandonment of the proposals at the end of the year.

September saw the start of a pilot scheme to address the resource problem of maintaining the park to a standard meeting the aspirations of our membership. The scheme which is a partnership between Green Care and Future Skills is leading to improvements on the park for all to see whilst affording meaningful training to unemployed eventually leading to meaningful employment.

Over the past two years FOPP has been through a complex bid procedure to the Fairshare Lottery Award which we hope will finally deliver improved facilities for younger park users such as the multi purpose pitch and extended play area, hopefully to commence from late summer onwards. Hopefully the remainder of the project, tennis courts, bowling green will be delivered as and when 106 monies become available.

For the past year we have been negotiating with the council and police to implement a park watch scheme similar to one adopted in Wolverhampton. We now have agreement to a pilot scheme for Priory and Stourbridge starting at the end of April. We hope that this will be another part of the jigsaw to reduce vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

For the future, we have produced a summarized strategy document "The future of Priory Park, we realise that funding is a key element in achieving our goals; we have secured agreement from a firm of experienced architects to assist us to put

together a team of professionals to assist us prepare a bid to Heritage Lottery for planning funds to prepare a plan for the complete restoration and preservation for the listed park and its buildings.

Our thanks go to our funders whom without their support our successful year would not have been possible. Dosti, Dudley Area Committee Networks, Community Education and Development, Neighbourhood Renewal, CAC, European Social Fund via Different Strokes and Connexions.

2. EDITORS REPORT

The Editor and Membership Officer Phil Griffiths reported that at the end of the year membership stood at 586 which represented a 38% increase made up of junior and senior members. We also have 45 associate members.

Our newsletter, *The Priority*, is distributed to all members and in addition to local Councillors, Council officials, The press, Archives Dept, English Heritage, schools and other friends groups within the borough, approx. 650 copies at the moment.

The junior section has their own page in the News Letter, they also receive a birthday card on their appropriate day, and we run competitions for them and tell them about forthcoming events. The format of our newsletter has changed from a single page A4 black & white sheet, when we started 2 years ago, to 8 pages in A5 format with full colour print both back and front; we aim to produce about 6 copies a year. We aim to print information both old and new but it is the member's newsletter so please let the Editor have any items for inclusion. Anyone who is able to help with the distribution, it would be much appreciated.

FOPP also produces its own Christmas cards, pictures and information; we also have our own web site maintained by Mike Hessey, who updates it almost on a daily basis.

3. LIASON OFFICERS REPORT

Janet Alderman-Rowe reported that in her roll as Liaison Officer she had tried to work with as many different people as possible, forging partnerships with the young right through to the statutory and voluntary groups

Over the last year we ran summer activities with other park groups, these consisted of a coach trip to The Think Tank in Birmingham, it was both educational and fun. There were sports events, arts and crafts, and culminating with a picnic in the park. 275 children attended the events; they received refreshments, certificates and souvenir brochure from The Think Tank. 100 children from Priory Primary School did a follow-up visit to the park to see the bulbs they had previously planted in flower they received a commemorative certificate and Easter Egg.

FOPP held it's second Christmas Carol Concert, choirs from both Castle High and Priory Primary performed in the unique surrounding of the park. We were also invited to be on the steering committee for the Pageant, working closely with Dudley MBC employees, we took part in the coffin race and won the cup for the best dressed group. Another event was the Castle & Priory Celebration Day, we

joined forces with local voluntary groups and hosted an event that was well attended, and fun filled and provided lots of information on what's on offer in the ward. It gave us an opportunity to show the community and get their comments, on the proposals for the NOF TYS Lottery monies we had bid for and won. The other big event of the year was the Fright Night in the park, again organised by local voluntary groups with FOPP's responsibility being to do the scaring, 250-300 people attended. The aim of the event was to engage local children /young people in a fun activity and prevent trick or treating.

FOPP feels that hosting of events within Priory Park for all members of the community will lead to an increase in park user ship, will raise the profile of the park and will, we hope, result in less vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Hosting events is enjoyable but there is a terrific amount of organisation, which goes on behind the scenes. We always need volunteer support helpers, the committee cannot do it all themselves.

Future events for 2004. Provisional programme.

1st April Steps to Health Launch

8th April Easter Egg Hunt 0-8yrs

7th May Seniors coach trip – Botanical Gardens

18th July Community Day – celebrate 75 yrs anniversary building Priory Est.

20th July Wheels event.

August - summer activities programme.

11- 12 September Pageant

31st Oct Halloween?

Dec Carol Concert

Dec Winter Social.

Our close links with the schools demonstrates FOPP's commitment to local young people, we are always willing to listen to what the children and young people have to say as they are the adult users of tomorrow.

4. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS

Clayton Thomas the out-going treasurer summarised his accounts saying that we started the year with £544. in the bank and finished up with £5,580. in the bank.

Arthur Weston was responsible for obtaining funds to the sum of £14,500.

Expenditure over the year was £9,253.

Out of the monies standing in the bank £3,000. Is committed. The Central Area Committee gave FOPP £2,000. for alterations on the pavilion on the basis that we would match it with £1,000. to provide equipment within the building. Also the Neighbourhood Renewal fund gave £2,000. we have to demonstrate that we have used these funds to capacity build etc. Noel Alderman-Rowe and Frederick Rich had audited the accounts which were accepted by the floor.

5. ELECTION OF HONORARY OFFICERS

Nominations were received to elect the following -:

(a) Secretary Chris Rich

(b) Treasurer Arthur Weston

This was agreed by the ayes from the floor. It was also agreed that Arthur would be Funding Manager and Treasurer and due to personal commitments of Officers there would be 3 signatories of cheques.

6. ELECTION OF GENERAL COMMITTEE

The following members of the existing committee were prepared to stand

Phil Griffiths

Janet Alderman-Rowe

Chris Broom

Julie Banner

Craig Gutteridge

Phil Blatchford

Sharon Blatchford

Harry Fleetwood

Cynthia Simpson (elected from the floor)

Balinda Chandler (elected from the floor)

This was confirmed by the ayes from the floor.

Mr. Arthur Weston thanked the outgoing Committee for all the hard work they had put in during the past year.

7. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

Mr. Frederick Rich and Mr. Noel Alderman-Rowe said they were happy to carry on as the Groups Auditors.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Chairperson had received 3 communications, 1 in writing 2 verbal.

1. Roger Bruton of Neighbourhood Watch who said he had written to the Lead Councillor for Parks & Leisure, Clr. Fraser Macnamara about the Liveability Award which the Deputy Prime Minister has announced, something in the region of 10 million to be given to the Midlands and of which Dudley is to get 3.4 million, of which certain monies is to come into parks; Roger along with other Neighbourhood watches are pressing for the borough to take a policy decision to fence and lock parks during the hours of non-usage and thereby reduce vandalism; Roger wants us to give our support to this.

(A) This issue is complicated, we do not know if this is what the majority of our members would want, although we support this in principle we do not know if this is the way we would go as we are hoping that we will get significant funds from the Heritage Lottery, would it affect those funds if the park was fenced, we do not know a lot more work has to be done on this subject.

2. George Williams, Treasurer of the Residents and Tenants Ass. asked that we raise the point of a Community building. Rumour has it that the buildings at the back of the old toilets are to be demolished and there may be an opportunity for a community building to be erected in their place. He would like this matter debated at some time to see if our members would support that issue.

(A) We see the park as a community area and community activities within the curtilage of the park can only enhance the profile of the park, so this is something we would probably support.

3. Since the pharmacy has closed on the corner of Limes Road and Priory Road a lot of work has gone into trying to establish a community pharmacy on the estate.

(A) Though, not a park issue it is something in the community our group would support and a petition is available for signing.

Patric Leight said that he was absolutely amazed and delighted at what the group had achieved; a lot of effort and hard work had gone into what had been achieved, keep up the good work.

Q1. Does the park have a Park Keeper – Marian Thexton

A1. After a lot of pressure a park keeper was finally recruited around October 2002. Because of the disability of the recruited keeper she did not get in post for a considerable period of time as she was awaiting specialist equipment to enable her to do her job. a hearing dog for the deaf and text phone. Eventually she did arrive on the park but there were incompetent problems with security etc, the end result was that in reality we never had a park keeper on the park on a permanent basis and that is the situation as it stands today, we have been promised that when finances allow it a park keeper will be recruited. We feel that the role of the park keeper is more important than the job description gives it; we think it should be a person who interacts with the people and the kids using the park. We also feel that the management of the park keepers is in the wrong place, we feel it should be with Green Care, the people, who look after the parks. We will try to secure alteration to the job description and the management structure of the park keeper when we eventually get one.

Q2. What has happened about Skateboard Park – Brian Wilson

A2. The issues regarding the skateboarding park have been going on a long time. Dudley Council have now got a policy and that is that there will be X number of skateboard parks around the borough, it has certainly never been decided from the Councils point of view or from our point of view that it will go on the park. We know that there is a local movement that feels that it should be on the park but our consultation has shown us that that is not necessarily what our membership want. We feel that there is a suitable area on the park for a skateboard park, not on the Bowling Green but in the area at the back of the pavilion between the hall and the

Boxing Club. It is proposed that the Wheels event to take place on the back of the Celebration Day, bring skateboard ramps and this will probably happen on the tennis courts. The Central Area Committee had looked at Priory Park as a place for a skateboard park, but that is as far as it went, no decision was made. FOPP have never had any discussion of any kind on a skateboard park.

Q3. How long will it take to get the play area done – Joanne Powell

A3. 11 parks had to go through an evaluation process where we all had to make bids, there were two band 1 projects, each was for £100,000. Ours was the No.1 bid, it then went to an appeal, to Fraser Macnamara and Duncan Loundes, where it was up-held ours was the No.1 bid. The money is there and it is thought that Dudley is starting it down; they are almost at the placing of contract stage. We have had 3 quotes and all the information has been passed to the Council. In timescale we are talking about, the Multi purpose pitch, our number one objective in phase 1 will be commenced in late summer i.e. September, with the play area to follow, it is to be zoned, with provision of more stuff for the toddlers, and at the very least a space net, swings and possibly a cable ramp for the older teenagers. The cheapest quote for the whole project including refurbishment of the tennis courts and to fence secure and get the bowling green up and running, was £140,000. but to do the whole project we were realistically looking at £175,000.

We were told that we had £100,000 from the Fairshare Lottery and that there could be £70,000 106 money from work going ahead on the old University grounds. We have heard from un-official sources, though not confirmed, that a significant amount of 106 money is planned for Grange Park, we would like this for both parks and we will continue to put pressure on to try and get this. It is an ambitious project but we feel that with the use of Future skills doing some of the work we may be able to get it completed. Our kids deserve it, a lot of their efforts went into the project, and they have very little on the park.

Q4. Is anything being done to protect the ruins from further deterioration, and what about lighting – Malcolm Blatchford.

A4. We have had a small amount of work done last year which consisted of re-pointing and steel pins being inserted in the arch, the idea is that things will be done on a regular basis as and when they occur. We have had meetings with the Council but the simple answer as to lighting and fencing is there is no money available. One way forward is to go for a project bid of £50,000 which will enable us to have a team of professionals who will prepare a complete Master plan for a 5 to 10 year period for the restoration and enhancement of the whole park.

Arthur Weston thanked everybody for attending and the meeting closed at 8.30.