

FRIENDS OF PRIORY PARK

**Annual General Meeting
Held at Priory Primary School
on 27 April 2005 at 7 pm**

Minutes of Meeting

Apologies - Received from Tony Callear, Pat Vella, Sally Orton, Omar Sharif and Brian Wilson

Approximately 50 members of the public were in attendance, including the three local Ward Councillors and prospective Member of Parliament, Ian Austin.

1 Minutes of AGM held on 12 March 2004 - Agreed as an accurate record.
(Proposed by Clayton Thomas, seconded by Ann Lewis)

2 Matters Arising - None were raised.

3 Annual Report

a) Chair's Report - Arthur Weston (AW)

AW confirmed that the Committee had continued to build on the success of previous years, in that the membership had increased to approximately 700 (adults and young people) and a number of varied and interesting events had been provided, with the assistance of local partnerships and members of the community.

AW was pleased to report that the Fairshare Lottery funds have provided the Multi User Games Area which has proved popular. There have also been additions to the play area which have been well received by the younger park users, but Committee Members were disappointed that the finished product had not fulfilled the original aspirations.

The intention is to continue the Transforming Your Space theme with the renewal of tennis court fencing in the near future, with funding from Dudley MBC. The total spend on these items being in the region of £130k.

AW stressed the importance of forging and maintaining partnership working with groups such as: Steps to Health; Action Heart; Age Concern; the Local Community and other Friends Groups. Indeed the activities of Parks Groups throughout the Borough over the past few years has played a large part in the Lottery Liveability Award to Dudley MBC of £3.4m. FOPPs share of this amount is £79k, with the possibility of more as allocation and works progress.

AW cautioned that the priorities as identified as part of the public consultation cannot be delivered within the £79k therefore further consideration/debate is required.

Future Skills - FOPP were pleased with the transformation to the park over the last two years, partly attributable to the Future Skills scheme operating at Priory Park. AW went on to outline the successful partnership working between Green Care and Future Skills and the positive outcomes for users and trainees. FOPP are pleased that the Liveability award will ensure that the project continues for a further 3 years, and will be extended to include Netherton Park. AW drew attention to the need to acquire capital resources to purchase materials to enable other trades to be actively pursued in the park, ie paving, building and repair of walls, etc.

Heritage Lottery Bid -AW reported that FOPPs bid had been successful, ie £42.5k (85% of project costs), the remaining £7.5k being donated by Dudley College, with site surveys to the value of £5k. Dudley MBC have provided funding to the value of £2.5k to commission an accredited conservation architect to prepare a tender brief for the engagement of a team of experts to plan the preservation of the park and its buildings. At this point, AW introduced Bob Tolley of Walker and Duckham. Bob has been on board from the start of the project, without recompense. On behalf of the Committee, AW thanked Bob for his efforts to date to help to protect and secure the long-term future of the park and its buildings.

Bob Tolley spoke briefly about his background and interest in Dudley, the Priory and its Park. Bob explained that a project team is to be appointed and that this must be carried out as a competitive process. The team will comprise an archaeologist to carry out an archaeological evaluation and a firm of landscape architects. A conservation management plan will be produced, which will be started in June with a view to completion by Christmas. At that point, reference will be made back to Heritage Lottery for their continued support. It is anticipated that this will be forthcoming.

AW made reference to the Park Watch which is a further way of attempting to reduce damage, vandalism and antisocial behaviour. This helps Committee members to record such incidents so that appropriate action can be taken.

Awards and donations - The following were highlighted:

Community Pride (£200)
DELL in partnership with Dudley 13th scouts (£700)
Dudley Association of Community Networks (£180)
Dudley Beacon and Castle PCT (Steps to Health) (£190)
St Thomas and St Luke's (Play equipment) (£737)
Dudley College (£5k)

Dudley MBC (£2.5k)
Transforming your Space, Fairshare Lottery (£100k-plus)
Lottery Liveability (£79k-plus)
Heritage Lottery (£42.5k)

AW painted a very positive future for the park, providing an enjoyable, safe and rewarding place to be enjoyed by all age groups. However, he stressed the serious nature of the incidents of ARSON, which could cause extremely serious damage and physical injury. He outlined damage as a result of a recent arson attack at Priory Hall. Members of the public are encouraged to contact the police as a matter of urgency in order that such incidents can be resolved/treated quickly.

The situation with regard to a permanent park-keeper has been worrying and has exacerbated the arson problem. However, Dudley MBC are aware of FOPP's concerns and action is being taken to resolve the situation.

Thanks - AW concluded his address on a happier note by thanking the following:

The Committee, for their dedicated hard work
Mike and Thelma, for their efforts to keep the park litter-free
Mike for excellent support with regard to I.T.
Phil for his prodigious work in producing the Newsletter and organising circulation
Priory Primary School for the use of the Hall
Sources of Funding appreciated
Green Care and Future Skills
Dudley MBC
Members of the Community for their continued backing and support

b) Editor's Report - Phil Griffiths (PG)

Membership - PG confirmed that membership continued to show a steady increase, with 622 bona fide members and a further 117 juniors. A further 43 officials and organisations are registered as Associate members. Each junior member receives a personally signed Birthday card on the appropriate date. Although there are other Friends Groups in the Borough none have anywhere near this number and this body of people is a force which carries much weight in the Committee's dealings with DMBC.

Newsletter and Website - PG confirmed that FOPP has two principal means of communication with its members:

FOPP's Website which updated regularly. This professional operation is widely accessed by members and council officials, for which we must thank

Mike Hessey. There are several links to other sites some of which have been placed at the request of other organisations.

The Priority is distributed free to all FOPP members and copies are also sent to the associate members mentioned previously, including local newspapers, Council officials, English Heritage. The format has grown from a single sided A4 black and white Xeroxed sheet to the current eight page A5 size with colour front and back. The last issue carried a further two pages of colour thanks to our printer who was so impressed by the quality of the photographs that he (Tom Kylie of Quality Print Plus) donated the cost free of charge. There is no particular printing date, as it tends to be produced when the material is available.

A section is included in the Newsletter for Junior Members, which includes competitions with prizes donated by local organisations. Consideration is to be given to ways of acquiring funding for the production of the newsletter and PG asked if any members of the audience had any suggestions for sponsorship, etc. He thanked the volunteer distributors for their continued support in circulating newsletters regularly.

Christmas Cards - PG confirmed that over 1,000 cards had been sold last Christmas. The production of the cards is voluntary and costs are barely covered. However FOPP Committee regard this as a means of publicity and will continue to produce cards for Christmas 2005.

Competition - PG confirmed that FOPP had entered the annual competition run by DMBC under the Community Pride banner. FOPP was awarded 3rd prize of £200 in the Art in Public Places section. The prize money will be put towards creating a robust display of artwork in the neglected circular rose garden in front of Priory Hall. Dudley College Art Department have been invited to put forward ideas for this display and the initial proposal is for a 'statue' of a Monk (2 metres high) which will face the Priory Ruins. Comments requested on the project - update to be included in the next newsletter.

c) Liaison Officer's Report - Janet Alderman-Rowe (JA)

The focus of the Liaison Officer's report was a review of events and activities during the period April 2004 to April 2005. Some of these are listed below:

Easter Egg Hunt 2004 - successful event attended by 95 young people

Visit to Botanical Gardens in May 2004 - Successful, included individuals/ clubs

Action Heart Ramble - Regular event in FOPP calendar

Visit to Ackers Activity Centre - Thirty-three olds (Young people worked well together in group situations) - 13th Dudley Scouts involved

Steps to Health Initiative - Launched in April 2004 - FOPP worked closely with Melanie Taylor (Steps Co-ordinator) - variety of activities: football, basketball, tennis coaching, plus multi-activity fun sessions
Zoo - Visit by zoo staff for an awareness-raising event, encouraging young people to respect wildlife - very popular
75th Anniversary of the Building of Priory Estate Event
Visit to Ash End House Children's Farm, Tamworth - 60 young people for hands-on practical feeding and grooming. Well received

The February 2005 Half Term coincided with British Bird Week and Chris Jones (Midland Bird of Prey Rescue Centre) visited the park to exhibit Birds of Prey. There were art and craft activities, making paper owls, making/handling bird cake) - again this was well received by the 60 - 80 young people who attended.

March - FOPP took the opportunity to organise a Crocus Walk to raise funds for the Breakthrough Breast Cancer - Approximately £250 raised. Activities included a balloon race, the winning balloon being rescued in Dorset!

Sunday, 1 May 2005 - Planned Action Heart Ramble

In essence, 2004/05 had been a very busy and rewarding year, made successful by the hard work put into it by Committee Members who have shown and continue to show great dedication to make the events, trips and activities a success.

4 Financial Accounts - AW (Treasurer)

A detailed breakdown of the financial report for 1 6 04 to 31 3 05 was featured on page 11 of the AGM booklet circulated prior to and available at the meeting.

Overall the bank balance at the start of the financial year was £5672.82

Receipts throughout the year were £3615.39

Expenditure was £6279.80

Bank balance at the end of the financial year was £3008.41

It was noted that funding is available for capital but that there are problems around obtaining funding for revenue items. AW felt that Central Dudley Area Committee should be encouraged to address this issue as it would alleviate problems in relation to obtaining revenue funding.

Audit of Accounts - Agreed at the meeting that Noel Alderman-Rowe and Frederick Rich continue to audit the accounts.

5 Election of Honorary Officers

- a) *Secretary*
Christine Rich, outgoing Secretary, had agreed to stand for the office of Secretary for the 2005/06 financial year. There were no other nominations. Agreed by all that Christine Rich serve as Secretary for the period stated above.

- b) *Treasurer*
AW, present Treasurer, will be stepping down in view of other commitments. One nomination (Mark Knowles) had been received for the post of Treasurer. Proposed by Roger Bruton and seconded by Christine Rich that Mark Knowles be appointed Treasurer of FOPP for the financial year 2005/06. This was agreed unanimously.

6 Election of General Committee

The under-mention current members of the Committee had intimated that they were prepared to continue as Committee Members for the financial year 2005/06.

Janet Alderman-Rowe
Julie Banner
Phil Blatchford
Sharon Blatchford
Christine Broom
Harry Fleetwood
Phil Griffiths
Craig Gutteridge
Cynthia Simpson
Arthur Weston

As Belinda Chandler had not attended meetings during the 2004/05 financial year and had not notified Committee of any intention to continue as a Committee Member, it was agreed that Belinda not be a member of the Committee for 2005/06 financial year.

There were no other nominations from the floor. Those members listed above were confirmed as Committee Members for 2005/06

7 Appointment of Auditors

Noel Alderman-Rowe and Frederick Rich confirmed that they were prepared to continue as Auditors for the 2005/06 financial year and they will continue to fulfil this role until clarification is obtained as to whether professional auditors will need to be engaged in view of the considerable sum of money which FOPP has obtained from Heritage Lottery. Action - To be followed up by Committee

8 Any other business - Public Forum

Question and Answer Session

Roger Bruton - Advice from RB (Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator) for members of the public to contact the police by dialling 999 if there is anything suspicious or threatening on the park which requires police attention. He felt that this was preferable to ringing the 'Call Centre (0121)' number.

John Beddall - JB queried whether it was in the remit of the Contractors recently engaged in work on the park to repair the Path at the Woodland Avenue entrance to the Park. In answer, AW confirmed that the issue was being addressed by Green Care and the Council. The Council believe that the damage caused by the work of the contractors should be made good and they are actively pursuing this.

In answer to RB's query as to whether the paths could be widened so that larger vehicles could use the paths, he was reminded that the park is a 'listed' area and that his proposal would need to be checked out with Heritage personnel. However, it was not felt that this would be appropriate for all the paths on the park, and it was felt that they should be uniform. This proposal will not be pursued.

Priscilla West raised a query regarding antisocial behaviour and the alcohol free zone for Dudley Town Centre. AW confirmed the decision of FOPP that the park be included in the alcohol-free zone, this would enable Police to take action, when appropriate, and will help in controlling antisocial behaviour. FOPP are trying to work closely with the Police, and signage regarding the alcohol-free zone will be displayed shortly. Members of the public were urged to feed through information to the police or, if appropriate, to Committee Members if they have any information relating to arson attacks or to other anti-social behaviour. Information regarding contact details will be included in the next FOPP Newsletter. Action - PG

Concerns were again voiced regarding the necessity of appointing a full-time park keeper at an early date. There is a Community Police presence in the park but Priory is only part of their 'beat'; however contact can be made with the Community Police if necessary.

RB asked if information is available relating to the costs associated with repairs following acts of vandalism. AW outlined on-going discussions relating to fencing of Priory Hall and the costings associated with that, which went some way to addressing RB's query.

The meeting closed at 8.30 am. AW thanked the attendees for their continued support.

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