

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden held at the Independent Methodist Church, Grappenhall, on Wednesday 16 May 2018

Present: Brian Johnson (Chairman), Kath Brown (Secretary), Ian Fountain, Bob Jennings, Jane Coumbarides, Bill Leah, Erin Dawber and 38 other members.

1. Welcome

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed members.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from: Lynda Ralphson, Kate Fox, Sue James, Peter Lewenz, Ian Kirkpatrick, Sue Coumbarides, Chris Buckley

3. Minutes

The minutes of the last AGM, held on 17 May 2017, were accepted.

4. Chairman's Report

The Chairman (Brian Johnson) presented his report, the main points being as follows:

- I have enjoyed my 8 years as Chairman, but am now standing down due to changes in the relationship with the Parish Council.
- We currently don't have an events co-ordinator, so have no events planned for this year.
- We have had some very successful, well-attended events over the last 12 months: Easter egg hunt, spring fayre, coach trip, fun day, apple day and the autumn and Christmas fayres. Thanks to everyone who helped and supported these in any way.
- We also hosted the Stockton Heath festival play and will be doing this again this year – we will need stewards to help on the night.
- At tonight's meeting, there will be voting on important issues regarding the future of the walled garden, when you have heard all the information.
- I would particularly like to thank Ian Fountain, our Treasurer, who, together with his late wife Elizabeth, has spent so many hours working for the benefit of the garden; also Bob and Lynn Jennings for their work on the produce stall and Bob's gardening – many people have remarked how they enjoyed talking to Bob about the history of the garden and his knowledge about gardening in general.
- Thanks are also offered to Jean Heath who organised many of last year's events, and to the other members of the executive committee.

5. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer (Ian Fountain, IF) gave a quick summary of his report, which had been circulated prior to the meeting (together with the audited accounts – all attached to these minutes). Ian noted we had contributed over £55,000 to the garden over the last few years.

Approval of the accounts was supported unanimously.

6 The Future of the Friends

Recent difficulties between the Friends and the Parish council (PC) have led to the need to consider whether the Friends should continue or be dissolved completely. The main reasons for this were set out in the AGM invitation letter, as reproduced here:

- The PC has requested that only small events are held at the gardens as they believe larger events have health and safety implications that could be difficult to manage.
- The PC has also requested that the sale of any food that may be eaten immediately at events is stopped as it was felt that this created competition for Apé bars.

- The PC agreement in place with Apé Bars regarding the use of the main glasshouse during café opening hours resulted in the Friends produce stall being moved outside of the main space. This decimated sales and became an unviable option for the Friends to sell garden produce and our own merchandise during inclement weather.
- Restrictions now placed on the Friends for access to the garden outside of normal opening hours impacts our ability to set up and dismantle events and to carry out necessary work on our equipment.

Ian had produced a detailed background note, which was read to the meeting by the Secretary. This included a number of additional points, summarised here:

- Nowhere suitable had been provided in response to our request for an alternative venue for selling produce, and councillors had said that any cost incurred in providing an alternative location would have to be borne by the Friends. Consequently, the Friends committee has handed back to the PC the total responsibility for selling produce, buying seeds, etc.
- The clerk had commented, in a written background document to the Estates committee, on matters which had no relevance to our request for an alternative location (these included comments concerning jam-making, honey sales, and the staff feeling undermined by the Friends). The Friends' representative had not been allowed to query, correct or refute these comments at the Estates Committee meeting, or at a subsequent meeting with the PC chair (and subsequently resigned from the PC). On seeing these comments, the volunteers who made jam from surplus garden fruit, provided honey and sold the garden produce for most Sundays over a period of 9 years, resigned from this function.
- The movement of the produce stall and imposition of the above conditions had been presented as a *fait accompli*, with no prior notification, discussion, negotiation or compromise. The PC's only concern appears to be to keep Apé Bars happy, and there has been no support for the Friends from Councillors or staff over these issues. As a result, 3 of the members of the Friends Committee, including the Chair, have resigned.

A number of comments and questions were then raised from the floor. The main points are set out below, with responses from the committee, where they were able to respond, in brackets.

- How does the PC plan to run the garden if it doesn't have the support of the Friends? (We believe this will be down to Graham and the new part-time gardener.)
- Does the PC intend to sell produce themselves?
- Walton Hall, Tatton Park and other venues have cafés, but still run events with food stalls.
- What is the problem with larger events? (There were issues at the Xmas fayre with the main glasshouse becoming overcrowded, with people bringing in food from the outside stalls. However, Apé didn't bring this to the warden's attention at the time.)
- Don't understand the concern re competition – the length of the queues at the café is already rate-limiting.
- The Friends have provided funds towards fitting out the kitchen and surfacing the back yard – this now all seems to be for the benefit of the café.
- Do Apé pay rent? (Yes. The income is needed since rates have been charged since the glasshouses were restored.)
- Which areas are Apé actually contracted to use? They seem to be spreading further, eg to the outdoor picnic tables, tables under the apple trees and the green gazebo. This means we now have a café with garden, rather than a garden with café, which is upsetting people. (We understand the contract covers the glasshouse and kitchen. However, as Apé are cleaning the outside tables, they need to be in control of them. The Friends, since they funded its provision, have insisted that the green gazebo must remain available to everybody.)
- Was the produce stall not seen as a problem when the contract was initiated? (No, it has only been seen as such since the café got busier.)

- Is there a failing in the commitment made to the Heritage Lottery Fund re community involvement if there are no events, etc?
- Why has there been no conversation with Apé in the hope of tempering their requirements?

Cliff Taylor (CT), a parish councillor but attending as a member of the Friends, offered to present what he understands to be the PC's view and made the following points:

- The PC recognises the enormous contribution made by the Friends.
- It's objective is to ensure that the Walled Garden is sustainable for the future - hence need to rent the café to Apé Bars and establish a professional organisation.
- The PC thinks the Friends should still have a role – need to agree what that role should be.
- Management responsibility for the garden lies with the Clerk and the Gardener/Manager. For financial sustainability, we need to balance the books – hence the contract with Apé, which means that the space is theirs for 3 days per week.
- The PC would still like the Friends to sell produce and has asked the Friends to provide plans and costing for a cabin. (IF interjected that this would be at the Friends' cost – CT responded that this may be negotiable and the door is open for discussion.)
- In H&S terms, the Gardener/Manager holds overall responsibility for what happens in the garden – it is thus reasonable that he should control the keys, but there is no intention to limit access.

A second Parish Councillor, John McQuillian, added that there had been a forum for discussion with the Friends, but this had broken down and needed to be reinvigorated; the PC has not walked away from engaging with the Friends, rather the other way round.

Responses from the Committee and the floor included:

- Hard to see how a cabin (for produce sales) would work with the glasshouse frontage.
- Keys have been held by the Friends for 11 years with no problems – collecting and returning them as needed will make life more difficult for the volunteers. (CT responded that a more formal arrangement was necessary in this day and age – the responsible person needs to know who is in the garden and when.)
- Going forwards, we need to establish a framework for discussion with the PC. The Estates Committee has been the only forum so far, with only 1 representative from the Friends (and that only because the Treasurer was also a parish councillor).

The Chairman drew the discussion to a close, reminding the meeting that the resolution was whether the Friends should continue in existence or not. There was a proposal from the floor, that a decision on this should be delayed for 3 months, to allow a forum (outside the Estates Committee) to be set up with the PC, with an extraordinary general meeting being held in 3 months time. This was put to the vote and carried by a large majority, with 1 person voting against. **(Action AGM18/1 – Committee)**

7. Future expenditure plans

There are ongoing commitments for funding (agreed by the Committee over the last year) for the carving of a replacement bench seat, purchase of good quality tools and to help refurbish the large gazebo. No other plans were made.

8. Gardener's Report

In the absence of Graham Richardson, Gardener/Manager, his report was read by Bob Jennings. The main points included:

- Rhododendron ponticum continues to be cleared. 2 island beds have been created in one cleared area, planted with azaleas, hydrangeas, hebes, primulas and epimedium.

- It's been confirmed that the Blue Atlas cedars are suffering from Sirococcus blight, for which there is no known cure. The 2 largest specimens have been removed as they were becoming a danger to the public.
- A pair of coots arrived in February and now have 3 young.
- Continuous rain and the prolonged cold spell led to late preparation of the land for planting potatoes, beans and onions; these are now all in and will soon be joined by the more tender crops.
- Apples are all in blossom; the peach, nectarine and fig in the glasshouses are bearing fruit.
- The gardens received a Green Flag community award for the first time last year. We are confident we will retain the award for another year, following a recent re-inspection.
- We currently have 19 garden volunteers, including one student. We sadly lost 2 of our longest-serving volunteers over the winter – Bob Foster and Betty Hatton. They will be sorely missed.

In response to a question from the floor, it was confirmed that the volunteer gardeners report to Graham and would not be affected if the Friends weren't to continue.

9. Election of officers

With the current Chair, Brian Johnson, stepping down, there had been a nomination for Geoff Weston to take on this role. Geoff gave a brief summary of his background and was unanimously elected to the role. At this point he took over chairing the meeting.

Ian Fountain announced his intention to step down from the role of Treasurer at last year's AGM and has made considerable efforts to find a replacement, but unsuccessfully. In the absence of any nominations or volunteers from the floor, Ian agreed to stay on until a replacement is found. He has the names of 4 more people who may be interested in the role and will pursue these (**Action AGM18/2 – Ian Fountain**).

The Events Co-ordinator role has been vacant since Christmas. There were no nominations or volunteers from the floor. One person has been named as a possibility and this will be followed up (**Action AGM18/3 – Geoff Weston**).

The Publicity Co-ordinator role has been vacant for some time. There had been no nominations but Ray Howarth volunteered from the floor and, there being no objections, will take on the role.

In the absence of any nominations, Ian Fountain agreed to continue as Web and Social Media Officer, which he has been doing for some time in addition to his Treasurer role.

There had been no nominations for the General Member role becoming vacant with the resignation of Bill Leah. Nina Kingston volunteered from the floor and, there being no objections, will take on the role.

With the PC's appointment of a part-time Warden/Assistant Gardener, there is no need to retain the role of Volunteer Gardener Co-ordinator (becoming vacant with the resignation of Bob Jennings).

Erin Dawber, Jane Coumbarides and Kath Brown agreed to continue in their current roles of General Member, Membership Secretary and Secretary, respectively.

10. Any other business

Thanks were offered from the floor to Brian Johnson and Bob and Lyn Jennings for the great work they have done for the garden over many years.

11. Close

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting.

Friends of Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden

Treasurer's Report for the year to 31 March 2018

This is always the boring part of the proceedings, but it's very important you all know how the charity's money is being raised and spent. This is also my last report as, after ten years in the role of Treasurer, I am retiring from the position (although this will depend on the resolutions later on the agenda).

I am pleased to present for your acceptance and approval the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2018.

With the level of our activities, we are not obliged by the Charity Commission to have our accounts audited, but I've always believed that it is in the Members' best interests that the accounts are properly checked. Once again, we are pleased that these have been audited by Ian Baxter, a local Chartered Accountant and Friend of the garden. I would like to express my thanks to Ian for carrying out this important function, which he has done for a number of years.

There were no items that gave any cause for concern, and Ian has issued and signed an Independent Auditors Report. The accounts will appear on the Charity Commission website in due course.

Accounts

The accounts for the year to 31 March 2017 show a surplus of Income over Expenditure of £5,365.68, which is a slight increase over last year's final result.

Just a few items to note on the accounts:

Income and Expenditure Account

Income

We have not applied for any grants during the year – all income has been generated by ourselves

Membership

The receipts from new and renewed memberships have slightly increased from the previous year, but this still reflects the difficulty we experience in increasing membership back to the levels that existed before the glasshouses restoration.

Events

Most events made a surplus this year, apart from the Members' Only event, which is not intended to make a surplus; and the Coach Trip, which includes the deposit for the trip planned in 2018, which has been cancelled due to the uncertainty surrounding the Friends' future. There was no Food fayre in 2017, but we held successful Spring and Autumn Fayres in addition to the Xmas Fayre. These were, as usual, very successful. However, due to incidents involving the Community space at the Xmas Fayre, the Parish Council has stated that we must downsize the level of our events. Thanks are due to Jean Heath, our previous Events Co-ordinator, for organising these events.

Merchandise

General We continued to sell our own pens throughout most of the year, and have recovered the cost of buying them.

History Books There was still quite a lot of interest in the History books, sales of which continued on a reasonable basis. We have more than recovered the cost of printing.

Produce

1

Income from sales is comparable with last year. The apple juice in smaller bottles has been sold only to the café operators as Grappenhall Post Office, our only other outlet, closed.

Equipment

Almost no equipment has been purchased for the garden, despite our requests to the gardener/manager for ideas.

Balance Sheet

Bank Balance

The bank balance at 31 March was £26,070.03, which is well up on last year due to a lack of requests for investment in the garden by the PC and the gardener/manager.

As a result of our fundraising, and with our suggestions, ideas and finance, during the last eleven years we have contributed over £55,000 to enhancements such as the glasshouses restoration, the new kitchen, and the courtyard resurfacing, plus countless smaller projects (e.g. wood carvings, culvert bridge, fruit cage).

Finally, I would like to thank the Executive Committee and Members for their support during my ten years in the Treasurer role.

Ian Fountain (Treasurer)

Friends of Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden

Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 March 2018

	Income £.p	Expenditure £.p	Net £.p	31-03-17 £
Annual Membership				
Forms		99.98		
New	140.00			
Renewal	1430.00			
Total Annual Membership	1570.00	99.98	1470.02	1258
Donations Received				
Green Boxes (Books)	451.42			
Other	1280.76			
Pennies In Jars	14.82			
Total Donations Received	1747.00		1747.00	1479
Events				
Apple Day		3.00	-3.00	
Autumn Fayre	581.40	108.61	472.79	
Coach Trips	575.00	612.15	-37.15	
Easter	74.50	25.84	48.66	
Fun Day	258.10	79.94	178.16	
Members Only	408.20	456.85	-48.65	
Spring Fayre 2017	664.00	113.19	550.81	
Xmas Fayre	1669.20	712.59	956.61	
Total Events	4230.40	2112.17	2118.23	2416
Grants Received				500
Bank Interest				11
Merchandise				
General	139.50			
History Books	272.00			
Pots	10.80			
Total Merchandise	422.30		422.30	240
Produce	4761.96	2001.78	2760.18	1561
Refreshments	45.50	54.44	-8.94	-8
AGM and Meeting Costs		43.40	-43.40	-13
Bank Charges				-6
Equipment				
Garden		93.32		
Miscellaneous		1115.03		
Total Equipment		1208.35	-1208.35	-2241
Garden Purchases		325.93	-325.93	
Insurance		182.89	-182.89	-182
Misc		1008.72	-1008.72	-33
Newsletters		8.79	-8.79	-8
Postage		195.90	-195.90	-134
Publicity		54.07	-54.07	-59
Stationery				-34
Website		115.06	-115.06	-140
TOTAL INCOME/EXPENDITURE AND SURPLUS	12777.16	7411.48	5365.68	4607

Grant paid to Grappenhall & Thelwall Parish Council for Courtyard Resurfacing

-10000

Friends of Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden

Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2018

ASSETS	31-03-18	31-03-17
Cash and Bank Accounts		
Current Account	26070.03	20577.42
Cash Floats	215.00	275.00
	26285.03	20852.42
Other Assets		
Prepayments		66.93
TOTAL ASSETS	26285.03	20919.35
LIABILITIES		
Accruals	0.00	0.00
Creditors	0.00	0.00
TOTAL LIABILITIES	0.00	0.00
NET ASSETS	26285.03	20919.35
REPRESENTED BY:		
SURPLUS FUNDS		
Balance as at 31 March 2017	20419.35	25812.79
Surplus 01/04/17 to 31/03/18	5365.68	4606.56
	25785.03	30419.35
Less Grant to G&T Parish Council		-10000.00
		20419.35
Produce Fund	500.00	500.00
	26285.03	20919.35

B. Johnson

Chairman

N. Taylor

Treasurer

D. Baker

Auditor

11/4/18