

Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
10.15am – 12 noon, 26 October 2024
at the London Museum of Water & Steam,
Green Dragon Lane, Brentford TW8 0EN

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence**
 - 2 Minutes of AGM 2023**
 - 3 Financial Statement and Report of the Trustees for 2023-2024**
 - 4 Adoption of Reserves Policy 2024-25**
 - 5 Appointment of inspector of accounts for year to March 2025**
 - 6 Election of Executive Committee**
 - 7 Review of the year and discussion:**
 - Relationship between Friends and GDT
 - Humanitarian Aid Memorial
 - Orangery project funding
 - Revitalising the Stables project
 - 8 Any other business**
-

Minutes of the AGM on 23 September 2023 at Old Actonians Sports Ground

Present: James Wisdom (Chairman), Val Bott (Newsletter Editor, taking minutes), Steve Larcombe (Hon Treasurer), Sonya Leydecker (trustee), Patrick Salaün (trustee), Philippa Dolphin, Carol Stiles (Committee members), Alison Appleby, Diana Duff Miller, Isabel Langtry, John Wells & guest speaker Howard Simmons

Apologies: David Bays, David Bush, Maureen College, Valerie and Lawrence Peters, Mark Sanders.

Minutes: The minutes of the AGM in 2022 had been circulated in advance and were accepted as a true record of that meeting.

Financial Report:

The accounts, inspected by Freeman Carr, and a summary prepared by Steve Larcombe, Hon Treasurer, had been circulated in advance. Steve reported that the Friends organisation was in a good financial position despite poor returns from investments. The position had plateau-ed since the end of March and the accounts now held approximately £303,000. The policy continued to be that income from interest etc would be spent for the benefit of the Park and Museum, but it had been hard to do so in the absence of proposals from key staff. The sum of £3,000 had been offered towards horticultural work and a proposal for spending it was awaited. The stray £34 of restricted funding from an old grant had been transferred to the Museum.

The meeting accepted the report and agreed a vote of thanks to Steve Larcombe for his work during the year.

Reserves Policy: A draft Reserves Policy was approved. This continued to state that while income from interest etc would be spent each year, capital from investments would only be spent on larger projects if they fully complied with the Friends' charitable objects. The aim would be to

maintain sufficient funds in the current account to be able to pay sums which had already been committed.

Inspection of accounts: Freeman Carr had inspected the 2023 accounts and were prepared to continue in this role. They were reappointed for the year ending March 2024.

Election of Committee: Members of the existing committee were all prepared to stand again and were duly elected. Mark Sanders had been nominated to join the committee and was elected.

Chairman's review of the year: James Wisdom considered key matters from the previous 18 months. During the summer of 2022 the friends committee had agreed to work closely in partnership with the Development Trust (GDT). The restoration and bringing into use of the **Stable Blocks** was the absolute priority and a formal Expression of Interest had been prepared though he understood that the relevant Hounslow officer had not yet submitted it to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. £10,000 had been allocated by the Friends to fund work on clarifying the details and preparing the EOI. The other major project on which the Friends would be working with the GDT was **the Orangery**. Historic England was supportive. Though the structure had been restored as part of the Gunnersbury Regeneration Project, the proposal to add facilities at the rear which would increase its viability for functions and events had been cut. Now the aim was to review with the architects how the necessary infrastructure could be provided, to prepare a draft planning application and to raise funds accordingly. £15,500 of Friends' funds had been set aside for this purpose but on condition that this would be a community facility and not just a commercial one and that we would be represented on the steering group.

Spencer Lewis had been appointed in place of Chris Ellis as Head Gardener who had gone to Marble Hill. He had asked for help choosing designs prepared by Capel Manor students for replanting the **rose basket beds**. Three committee members joined him and commented upon how welcoming Spencer had been and on the quality of the students' expertise and imagination.

Most recently the Friends had made a pump-priming donation of £500 to help kick off the Museum's crowd-funding exercise to support their planned **Sci-Fi in West London exhibition**, then a further £5,000 to help them reach their target of £15,000. This lively project was being co-ordinated by Tom Crowley who had joined the teams as cover for the Curator while she was on maternity leave. Rewards of tickets to special events had been offered in return but few Friends had booked these so far.

Membership: Sonya Leydecker reported that numbers remained steady though modest at 112 members. Of these 67 paid by standing order. Several members had made generous donations in addition to their subscription fee which was very helpful. We noted that the number of members always rose when Gunnersbury appeared to be threatened but that while things appeared to be stable a smaller core group remained. We thanked Sonya for her work in keeping the membership records.

The business meeting ended with a unanimous vote of thanks to the committee.

Guest speaker, **Howard Simmons**, a member of the board of the Gunnersbury Development Trust, gave a presentation about its recent work since the governance was remodelled. He made clear that the original organisational structure had been deeply flawed; Ealing Council had been particularly keen on the CIC plan. Now the Trust was the parent, with a broad remit, and the CIC was its subsidiary with a specific operational remit. A key requirement was the transfer of local authority leases from the CIC to the GDT which had yet to happen. In addition to two legacy trustees from each of the existing bodies new trustees had been recruited in 2022 from 48 high quality applicants. They had energy, ideas and enthusiasm but it was a steep learning curve getting

to grips with the Park and Museum. And its chairman was under pressure as he had taken on a new role as Vice-Chancellor of Southampton Solent University at the same time as chairing the GDT.

There were several sources of funding: the two local authorities, facilities like the cafe and events, leases and special Museum funding from the Arts Council. Ultimately the aim was to generate more income on site to reduce the need to rely on big events. The Trust did not want to have to lose staff or close services. The local authorities had expected to taper their funding to a minimal sum after the completion of the regeneration project as the estate earned more, but with rising costs this was difficult. Hounslow was maintaining stable funding but Ealing was not. The sports hub was extremely problematic. Some of the pitches were inadequate and Covid had had a serious impact on sports operators. 'Better', the operator, was having to be subsidised by Ealing Council so the estate was not receiving the £130,000 pa it had expected from this source. The fire at the cafe meant the loss of income of over £70,000 a year but a decent income had been earned from the temporary stalls in the Park. Rebuilding would take time. The process of updating and transferring leases was taking too long; in particular Capel Manor College was still awaiting its lease so was not paying until that was resolved. In response to a question Howard said there was not yet a clear business plan in place.

The big issues were finding a way to restore and bring into use the Stables and Small Mansion which lay outside the Trust's leases, the Potomac and old Farm area and the pitches. Historic England and National Highways had already contributed substantial sums to make the Stables and Small Mansion watertight but both still required major funding. An excellent proposal to use the Stables as a 'collections hub' had been prepared and a response was awaited from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to a formal expression of interest. It would house museum collections, local studies and archive collections from the two boroughs and the Thomas Layton collection, with study, display and conservation areas. It had been formally agreed by both local authorities that the Small Mansion would have a community/learning/cultural role and would not be converted into apartments. A temporary 'meanwhile' use might be possible but the Trust had had to pay when lead had been stolen from the Small Mansion roof despite it lying outside their contract with the local authorities.

There was no scheme as yet for the southwest corner of the Park which included the Potomac lake and tower and the A4 entrance. The pitches were waterlogged because new drainage had been cut in an effort to save money. The Trust was awaiting a condition survey. There were also some difficulties to be resolved from the way external funding had been obtained to support the regeneration of the sports facilities.

Howard emphasised that the Trust wanted to make an effective partnership between the local authorities and the revised GDT charity to manage the Park and Museum as public facilities. The staff team was very committed and had worked long hours during Covid period. Funds were limited for salaries and it had not been possible to pay enough to recruit a new finance director. They were trying to take in-house things for which the GDT was paying a high fee to LB Ealing; by managing wedding and functions directly the Trust would retain a greater income. However, the grounds maintenance contract had to remain with LB Ealing for the time being.

Members raised and discussed a number of issues:

- the proposed memorial to Humanitarian Aid Workers, which would be the subject of a planning application. Concerns were expressed about the poor quality and appropriateness of the design, the proposed location in a busy area, and the risk of vandalism but Howard felt it was a good idea and important because of the high status of the artist.

- noise levels at big music events had been better managed because the council licence imposed different conditions. The stewards had appeared to have better training, were more courteous and clearing up and traffic management had been more effective. Those living close to the Park felt it had helped to know all the dates in advance and there was some pleasure in seeing young people enjoying themselves with income going into the estate.
- Isabel Langtry described Hampstead Art School, where she is Principal, and explained that her organisation could be interested in running a similar operation at the Small Mansion in the future.
- John Wells thought there would be enthusiasm for bringing back classical music concerts which would reach a different audience and be less problematic.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to Howard for being so frank and informative.