Friends of the Wickford Memorial Park

Annual General Meeting

AGM Minutes

Wednesday 25 May 2022 at 11.00am – Huttons Cafe

**Attendees:**

Kim Oakes KO

Steve Oakes SO
Derek Harrison DH
Marion Scott MS

Margaret Clarke MC
David Webb DW
Janet Dunn JD

Derek Dunn DD

Jeannie Lamb JL
Judith Loman JLO

Winifred Cattermole WC

Valerie Vine VV

Chriss Hands CH

Charlotte Trodan CT

Cheryl Reeves CR

Penny Wright PW

**Guest Speaker** - Josh Childs JC - Basildon Council Biodiversity Officer

1. **APOLOGIES**

Tracey Render (TR) Geoff Whiter (GW)

**Previous AGM Minutes from 2021**

The minutes from the inaugural AGM of the Friends of Wickford Memorial Park (the Group), held on 13 May 2021 were agreed, as read.

**Proposed** – MS

**Seconded** – DW

1. **THE GROUP CONSTITUTION AND COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

It was agreed that the Groups Constitution would remain as is.

**Proposed** – DH

**Seconded** – MS

None of those present wished to join the committee, when asked, and it was agreed that the current committee would remain unchanged, other than SO taking on the role of secretary from DH, who wished to stand down from this role, due to other commitments.

**Proposed** – JL

**Seconded** - WC

1. **CHAIRS REPORT**
KO delivered her report of the Groups activities and highlights as of 31 March 2022. This being its second year in existence, the Group continues to go from strength to strength. The Park continues to be a valuable asset to the Group and provides volunteering opportunities for the residents of Wickford.

Special thanks were expressed to all the committee members and volunteers for their hard work and dedication to the various projects and tasks achieved over the past twelve months.

Thanks were given to Mike Bromley for his continued work on the Groups website; to Basildon Borough Council Park staff for their enthusiastic support for the Group; and to Hutton’s Café for allowing us to use their premises during the year and for hosting this meeting with refreshments.

The Group has produced two newsletters this year to highlight the key activities and work going on in the Park. Key working parties this year have included the refurbishment of the Main Gates to the Park (with the help of Virgin Media Community team); removal of Himalayan Balsam from the river, in conjunction with the river authorities; the further tree planting of the recently acquired Beauchamps site; the maintenance, working and tending of the Heroes Arboretum; the planting of over 13,000 spring bulbs; and the planting of eighteen mature trees in Beauchamps as well as the replacement of four mature trees in the remembrance avenue.

The Home Front Garden was redesigned and planted up and plans were drawn up for the replanting of the raised bed in readiness for the Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

The Friends have promoted the Memorial Park through social media, including our Facebook site and other Wickford sites, via our Website through newletters and Website articles. We have worked with Basildon Communications Tead in promoting the park through short videos and articles about our work in the Together Borough Magazine.
We also arrange Walking Tours of the park which have proved popular.

The Group has had the backing of Basildon Borough Council and the Co-Op Wickford, in providing various funding during the year.

1. **FINANCE REPORT**

In the Treasurers absence, KO summarised the key points of the finance report.

The Group maintains a Bank Account with National Westminster Bank Plc, and currently has a credit balance of £158.74 after all grants, donations and expenditures.

Grants have been obtained from Essex County Council, Paypal, and Basildon Borough Council. Main expenditure during this year has been on further equipment and materials for and special planting around the Park.

The finance report was agreed to be a true and accurate record of the Groups finances as at 31 March 2022.

MS gave some information on approaches made to the Rotary Club and the Lions of Billericay for further donations, as well as joining the Basildon, Billericay and Wickford Services Group for funding, which is proving difficult. The Group could benefit from becoming a registered charity in terms of funding opportunities, but it was pointed out that this would cause additional workload in having to appoint an auditor for the Group.

MS also outlined a pending application to the Essex Community Foundation for a Neighbourhood Planning donation. and the Friends have approached George Jeffrey, the local Conservative Councillor for The Reflection Garden funding.

1. **FUTURE PLANS AND PROJECTS**

KO highlighted the following future plans and projects for the Group, which will be run in conjunction with Basildon Council Park staff;

**Beauchamps Field** – There will be further work carried out to include the completion of the inland ponds and wetland habitat, and community orchard

**Reflection Garden** – There will be a new Reflection Garden established at the Whist Avenue end of the Park and plans for this are already well established between the Group and the Parks team.

1. **PRESENTATION BY JOSH CHILDS (JC) BASILDON COUNCIL BIODIVERSITY OFFICER**

JC has recently taken on the newly established role of BioDiversity Officer for the Council and its various park locations.

JC has been involved with conservation since leaving school at 15, through work experience roles, and later studying conservation management. He worked for Medway Council for 2 ½ years as the Medway Estuary Ranger, and for the past four years was Essex Wildlife Head at Langdon Hills Park, before taking on his new role. His primary objective is the re-wilding of Basildon Borough Parks.

JC handed out a slide presentation on Basildon Council BioDiversity.

He explained that the parks three main areas, are now one site known as “Memorial Park” having officially taken over the Beauchamps site into the main park.

 BDC are trialling non-mowing programme in Gloucester park, and this will roll out to all parks in the borough in 2023

which essentially means focussing on the mowing of sports pitches, and relaxing mowing of other areas to create relaxation areas linking into green corridors.

Beauchamps site will be cut every 6 to 8 weeks.

The plans for the community orchard are being run with the aid of the East of England Apple Project and this will be planted up in Dec 2022. And will be native trees rather than imported from Holland.
There will be a wildflower meadow on the site of one hectare, or the equivalent of 2 ½ soccer pitches. This will be initially cut, cleared and harrowed in July 2022 and drill seeded in Sept/Oct 2022. It is hoped by Feb/March 2023 the seeds will begin to show and by the end of 2023, this should be well established.

The area known as Giddings Copse will largely stay untouched, perhaps with the thinning of some of the trees.

JC explained the Gloucester Park blue maps on his presentation, which outlines the blue areas which define the uncut and wild areas. There will be similar maps produced for the Memorial Park.

JC explained that conservation is a slow process taking around 8 years to fully establish and there is a government initiative for all developments to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity.

The Wildflower Garden (fenced area as apposed to the Wildflower Meadow on Beauchamps Site) will have an annual mix of planned seeds that will provide a visual impact year on year. There are also plans to add a Hibernaculum to the Park, which will be a “rubbish pile” for bugs and small wildlife to use for habitat.

MS asked about the installation of Raptor boxes into Beauchamps. JC is still looking to get these, but they are labour intensive in terms of maintenance. There is still a good chance that Bat Boxes will be put up.
JC said he was very impressed with the Friends facebook page, given the group had only been going for 2 years, and he loves all the positive comments and information it provides.

MS said the River conservation trust had been at the river this week to assess the current situation with the Himalayan Balsam. JC acknowledged this is still a problem.

1. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

JD asked about the continued poor state of the Park signage, which was a poor reflection on the Park in general. JC recognised this and advised there is money in the Council budget to apply standard signage across all the Parks in the Borough and this will be trialled in Gloucester Park, Basildon, before a major role out across all other locations.

MS said that Group members had asked whether TShirts , Sweat Shirts could be made for the Group, bearing the Friends, Logo. MS said she would enquire with the Uniform Shop in Wickford to set up a template logo, for members to have their own garments printed at their costs.

MS also felt that a “visit” to the planned Reflection Garden Site near Whist Avenue could be arranged in the near future to understand the plans and ideas for this project.

DH expressed his thanks to the Chair and Vice Chair for their continued work and dedication to the Group, as well as the hard work put in by all volunteers over the past year.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 12.18pm