

Minutes, AGM, Millfields User Group

Thursday 18 March 2021, Zoom session

Present: Harry Hewat (Chair); Bhavesh Hindocha (Secretary & Treasurer); Gill Harris; Bettina Maidment; Tim Evans; Christine Kings; Thomas Wheeler; Clare Taylor; Merle White; Celia Coram; Adrian Weidmann; Deirdre Whitfield; Lailuma Sakhidad; Emily Hallgarten.

Apologies: Cllr Ian Rathbone.

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the AGM and summarised activities in the last year in the park. Because of Covid there was not as much activity as usual but the following had been achieved:
 - a. the playground on Clapton Park Estate opening on to South Millfields has been opened and is proving extremely popular;
 - b. the toilets next to the playground in North Millfields are now open;
 - c. the space behind the electricity sub-station is still fenced off but it has been grassed over and we hope to get it open to park users in the middle of this year and plant trees and shrubs in the autumn;
 - d. more trees were planted in liaison with the Tree Musketeers on North and South Millfields over the winter;
 - e. the orchard trees are being pruned now
2. Election: Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer
The current Chair, Harry, said that he wanted to stand down. The current roles of Secretary and Treasurer are both being carried out by Bhavesh. Bhavesh is content to continue in these roles but also happy to see one or both roles taken on by others. He said that the Treasurer role is not very onerous - there is £182 in the bank.
It was agreed that Christine would become the new Chair of MUG
It was agreed that Bhavesh would continue in the roles of Secretary and Treasurer
It was agreed that other roles would be agreed at the next meeting following discussions with regular attendees. Anyone interested in taking on a role, or a project, is asked to contact Christine.
3. Membership lists
It was noted that there is no currently no committee and all meetings are open. Harry has been circulating a list of regular attenders with details of meetings. There is another, longer, list of people who have expressed interest who are mailed about activities. Christine agreed to talk to Harry about these lists and report back on how we might formalise them.
4. New playground on South Millfields
Merle raised concerns about this. This is promoted as a playground of Millfields Park but it's actually on Clapton Park Estate and the cost of maintaining and cleaning it will be charged to residents. She didn't think that there would be so much planting in the space and the planting has not been done properly (both with regard to the wall pots and the ground planting). She anticipates that the Estate will be paying for new plants. Adrian agreed that there is an issue with the plants: there are small and fragile and the wall plants can be lifted out in their pots. Plants near to the trampoline have already been trampled and the ground has been compacted as there is no fence or cordon to stop people walking over them or putting buggies on them.

There was surprise in the meeting that the playground was the residents responsibility and a sense that this was not fair. However, it was also suggested that the Tenants Management Association should be raising this rather than MUG. There are also concerns about noise from the playground for residents. Harry said that MUG had pushed the Council to include more planting and less artificial surfacing

There was a short discussion as to whether we should go ahead and fence off the ground space and replant or whether we should liaise with the Council. Bettina reported that Sam (Council Officer) has said that he visited the playground this week and had seen for himself the problems.

He said that the planting is not finished, they may remove the wall pots, and that if anyone wants to be involved in getting this bit of the playground sorted out they should get in touch. It was agreed that Bettina would stay in touch with Sam and that Merle should be involved in what happens next. Christine is also expecting to speak to Sam this week and will also mention this concern.

Adrian suggested that that we ask for a waste bin to be situated in the park next to the new playground (possibly on the outside wall) as empty coffee cups and other litter was being left in the playground. Christine will raise this with Sam.

5. Space behind the electricity sub-station

Christine was in touch with the Council at the end of last year about this. The area has been grassed over and we expect the space to be handed back to the park in the summer. Before the space was taken over by National Grid (NG) there were trees and bushes around the perimeter of the space along the NG walls. Although this was disputed by NG, maps were produced that showed this was the case. Nonetheless NG have made clear that they do not want these trees and shrubs replaced in the same place, although they accept that they have to provide funds to replace the number of trees that were removed.

Sam has said that he will be discussing tree planting in the area with the Tree Musketeers in order to draw up a planting plan. Christine has asked that MUG is involved in that process. She anticipates that tree planting will start after October and she would like to see it organised as a Millfields Community activity with people of all ages encouraged to take part.

Harry asked whether we could push for the plan to reinstate tree planting by the NG walls. Tim suggested that it's not worth fighting about; NG can object to the planting, it would delay the development of the area, and the previous space was not very inspiring. He said that the park has a variety of tree spaces: orchard, forest area (where the forest school is), the tree ring, the arboretum, the glade of plane trees and the thicket of poplars (between the footbridge and the orchard)... and we should think about what we'd like to see. Harry said he'd be really interested in thinking about the planting and creating spaces that are sociable.

It was suggested that we come up with our own planting plan. It was noted that Marcelo White is a professional arborist, who is local to the park and is also a Tree Musketeer, and we could ask him to join us along with one of the Council's tree officers to work through some ideas. Christine will raise this with Sam.

6. Opportunities to improve biodiversity

Gill is listed as our biodiversity officer but she said that she would prefer it if there was a small working group of interested people. She agreed to co-ordinate meetings on Zoom and/or in the park. The following people indicated a desire to be involved in the biodiversity working group: Bettina; Adrian; Harry; Merle; Clare; Christine; Tim. Gill will get in touch with these people, and anyone else who is interested, to try and set up a meeting.

7. Community Notice Board

Celia said that one of the things we really need to help raise awareness of what we're doing and involve more people is a community notice board. There are so many new people in the area and so many more people discovering their local park. It could provide huge benefits if we could put up notices about what's going on but also for other people to add their notices too. There was a discussion about Council noticeboards already in use (and some not in use) and what we needed. The consensus was for community noticeboards in North Millfields and in South Millfields where people would see them (next to the Council's). Christine agreed to raise this matter with Sam.

8. Millfields Cafe

There was a discussion about the cafe proposal that had been put to the Council and which had not been accepted. Christine was told that the Council had not been sufficiently confident about the proposal to invest time and energy in it; they had experience of other projects which had not been successful or where the prime movers had not stayed with it. Thomas said that there was huge support for the initiative because there is nothing like it around North Millfields (compared with the cafe on the corner of South Millfields which is very popular). Harry agreed to send Christine a copy of the MUG proposal and Christine agreed to find out from Sam whether

there was a possibility of revisiting this in view of the recent consultation on Hackney's parks and open spaces.

9. Next meeting
Christine will circulate some dates.

10. AOB
There was no other business.