

## Minutes, Millfields User Group

Thursday 18 March 2021, Zoom session

Present: Christine Kings (Chair); Bhavesh Hindocha (Treasurer); Harry Hewat; Gill Harris; Bettina Maidment; Clare Taylor; Merle White; Adrian Weidmann; Cllr Caroline Woodley; Will Adamsdale; Helen Morris; Wendy Reid; Anna Donoghue.

Apologies: Cllr Ian Rathbone, Deidre Whitfield, Lailuma Sakhidad, Tim Evans, Liz Henton, Anabeth Stirling

1. Minutes of the AGM  
The minutes were agreed.  
There were no matters arising not covered later on the agenda
2. New Playground

Merle informed us that the Council were expected to hand over the running of the playground to the Tenant Management Organisation on the Clapton Park Estate (TMO) soon. There had been a meeting about it yesterday. The TMO will then have responsibility for looking after all aspects of the playground except for the infrastructure (play equipment) which will remain with Hackney Council. So TMO staff will be responsible for clearing up the site. The architect brought in by the Council has talked to the TMO.

Merle said that rather than taking water to the wall plants she's taking the plants home and giving them a good soaking. That works better - the plants last about a week before needing more water.

Cllr Woodley introduced herself and said that she had taken over responsibility for parks from Cllr Jon Burke. She had been made aware of the concerns that had been raised by users and residents and the Council were trying to deal with these. Overall she felt that while she would like to ease the problems for the residents living in close proximity to the play area, the playground itself had been a huge success for children at play and was meeting a need for such an amenity.

Bhavesh said that he would fill in the background for Cllr Woodley... MUG had been campaigning for ten years to get a playground on South Millfields. MUG had no wish for the old playground on the estate to be used - there was plenty of space in the park and it was unfair for the estate residents to be responsible for it. The problems that are being faced now were completely avoidable.

Merle said that the responsibility on the TMO for cleaning and maintenance had been her primary concern. And there was no solution to the planting on the wall.

Adrian said that some of us have been discussing taking the wall planting down and putting it temporarily in the corner of the playground and planting in autumn. He argued against spending more money on contractors and instead involving the community in a planting session. Ideally there would be water on site for the planting - it would also reduce the use of plastic drinking bottles.

Merle reported that a quote had been obtained for putting water on the site and because there was no water source nearby a quote of £31k had been obtained.

Bettina said that she and Harry had met with Georgie Brown while plans for the playground

were being discussed and there was a plan for a mural on the wall which felt completely unrepresentative of the community. All the wall needed was some green planting of climbers in the ground. She can't understand why this didn't happen and why it can't happen now.

Helen said that her priority is children playing happily in the playground. She has concerns about the accessible swings having been removed and finds it difficult to understand why this has happened. There may be less noise now; the playground was very popular during lockdown but it has quietened down as children are allowed to take part in other activities. One problem was the lack of communication while this was happening - the local community thought that they were to be banned from the playground.

With regard to the play equipment Cllr Woodley said that the toddler swings and picnic benches were taken out to try and mitigate problems. No more equipment will be removed although some might be rearranged. There is an accessible basket swing still on site. She will be reviewing plans by the architect and will bring them back to the user group. The key objective now is to get planting in for screening, possibly a sensory garden and hedging, to help reduce the noise. She also took on board the preference for climbers and would take that away. She added that she had not been aware of the 10 year history prior to coming into the role and was working towards a positive outcome. She said that she would speak to Georgie about all of this.

Cllr Woodley also addressed the problem of communications. She said it was sometimes difficult to know how much information to put out and how best to communicate it. She did contact Christine and others who would be able to pass on the details but was reluctant to highlight problems more widely. She was sorry this had caused problems and she would discuss with the communications team how to be more effective at getting messages out.

Bettina said that scattered bark had been a problem. It should settle and we could store some of it for use later. Christine said that she had seen an email from a physiotherapist from Homerton hospital who has clients living in Caldecott way. They used to walk through the play area to enter the park but now feel it is unsafe for the elderly/disabled population. Adrian said that it had taken one person about 1.5 hours to clear the paths so if done regularly it shouldn't be a big problem.

Harry said that there are lessons to be learned from all of this. The Council pushed us towards design and build contractors and the playground was never designed properly. There should have been consultation with residents and it should have been done properly.

We agreed that there is nothing more that we can do other than continue to look after the wall plants for now, look to plant some climbers, and keep an eye on the scattered bark. If those of us who see anything that needs attention we can report it or round up a team to deal with it.

### 3. Biodiversity report

Adrian said that his group had discussed planting hedging around the edges of the park along roads to screen off noise, help block pollution, and increase habitat. There was general support for this from the group. Bettina suggested that we could get whips from the Woodland Trust and plant native hedgerows as a community initiative.

Harry agreed with planting hedging but not along the Lea Bridge Road inside the North Millfields fence. He referred to the new cycling track planned for just inside N. Millfields which will enter the park at the west end and join up with the existing park cycle track (top of Chatsworth Road to the river). He wasn't sure where this had got to but hedging was provided for in the plan. The two issues he was interested in looking at were hedging and mitigating fast cycling speeds in the park. He wasn't sure whether the proposed hedging would be between the road and the cycle path or the cycle path and the park. Harry agreed to contact Peter Hazard at the Council to get a copy of the plan and indicate that we wanted

to be involved in the consultation.

Christine reported on her discussion with Daven, the park manager, about mowing. Daven said that they are mowing in the spring and then the areas left to grow a bit wilder are being mowed again in the autumn leaving grasses and flowers to grow and set seed. The edges and the corners of the park are being largely left to grow, also around some trees in N. Millfields, and around some of the orchard trees and in the arboretum in S. Millfields. If we want to propose other areas to leave we can discuss this with him.

Christine suggested that when we're in the park we note any birds, bees, butterflies and other insects, animals and plants, and we can create lists which we can post on the website. We can do this as a citizen science monitoring exercise and if we can take photos too that would be really good. This was supported.

While discussing biodiversity with Georgie, Christine raised separate concerns about the cricket field being disconnected from both S. Millfields and N. Millfields (only half in jest she proposed closing the north end of Chatsworth Road and greening it over!). This led to a chat about having better connections between the cricket field and S. Millfields with clearer, wider exits/ entrances and places to cross the road. It also led to a discussion about the cricket field being completely inaccessible for prams and wheelchairs as there is no path anywhere on the field. Georgie agreed to raise these issues in the strategic plan for the park. Harry said that there was an opportunity to improve Chatsworth (between the two sides of the park) with parking removed, wider pavements installed and measures to reduce speeding and that he had raised this with Peter Hazzard in conjunction with the East-West cycle route.

Bettina asked whether there is any S.106 monies available from the new flats being built north of the tennis courts. No-one knew so Bettina agreed to look into this and report back.

#### 4. Spring, summer, and autumn activities in the park

Although the Council events team are not yet considering applications for park events Bhavesh proposed that we plan for a Circle Cinema evening in September by starting to fundraise. There was enthusiastic support for this.

Bhavesh introduced Will to the meeting. Will is a local performer and he proposed extending the cinema afternoon by having local artists performing in the park in the lead up to the cinema showing. It would probably be mainly music, local bands, and involving schools/ young bands. Also comedy. It would be organised under the umbrella of the Circle Cinema. Bhavesh is finding out about getting a grant (£1k previously got through "Community Chest") and crowd-funding. Will said that a bit more would be needed for performers who tend to have more equipment. We'd ask people to take their litter away and make sure everything is properly managed. It could be a great opportunity to get people together again. There was enthusiastic support for this too.

Adrian contributed a number of ideas for afternoon activities with kids: table tennis, giant chess, smaller installations. The Council is stretched at present and has already spent a lot of money on the park so he suggested that we are proactive and ask the Council to agree on some of these ideas subject to us raising the money to purchase or make the installations.

Cllr Woodley said that the Council were not killjoys but once an installation was in place it needed ongoing maintenance. She gave the example of a table tennis table on Stoke Newington Common which is very popular but needs maintenance if placed on grass.

Christine suggested organising two or three walks and talks in the park over the summer, perhaps on park trees, or plants, or local history. There was support for this. Christine also raised the proposed autumn tree planting behind the electricity and said that we can work with the TMs on planting plans. Harry, Merle, Bettina and Christine agreed to work on this.

Bettina said that if anyone wanted kit to do litter picks she can lend it out. She said that the parks staff do such a great job that there's not much litter in the park which is why Plastic Free Hackney arrange to meet at the Princess of Wales (last Sunday of the month) and litter pick along the river and on the marshes.

It was agreed that proposals for activities in the park this year need not wait for the next meeting. Proposals and updates can be circulated anytime to keep up the momentum.

#### 5. Update on cafe on North Millfields

The latest update from the Council is that they want to explore putting cafes in parks over the next few years but because of current pressures on the service there are no cafe opportunities being advertised at present in any parks. When they become available they will be advertised, and applicants will need to go through a public selection process,

There was a brief discussion on the benefits of having a cafe in N.Millfields (by the playground). MUG has argued for cafe there for years and has previously submitted plans. There is every expectation that it would make money because there is nothing else in the area: no pubs or coffee shops - only a co-op store two blocks away.

Adrian asked what facilities the building has. Harry said that it has water and electricity - it may not be state-of-the-art but it depends what sort of cafe is proposed as to whether it needs any work.

Wendy said that five years ago there was no interest in running a cafe at this site. Harry thought that this was for a mobile facility.

Christine said that interest more recently had been expressed in running a cafe there. There was a discussion about whether to approach the Council again but it was agreed that there was little point at the moment.

CLLr Woodley said it might be worth talking to the people who set up the Clapton Common cafe in the old toilet block. They went through Hackney Properties rather than Parks, but she would be happy to raise the question again with the team. Harry said that the Users group had already talked to Clapton Commons and had incorporated some of their ideas in our proposals. They went through Hackney Properties, who had been more responsive than Parks.

#### 6. Website and social media

People were asked to look at our website <http://millfieldsusers.org.uk> and let Christine or Harry have feedback on how they would like it to develop.

it was noted that we have a twitter account @MillfieldsUG which is currently being managed by Bhavesh, Bettina and Christine. We are hoping to embed this on the website.

Bhavesh said that he thinks he has details of the facebook account for Millfields <https://www.facebook.com/MillfieldsUG/?fref=nf>. He and Christine will liaise on this outside the meeting.

No-one volunteered to set up and maintain an Instagram account for now.

#### 7. Dates of future 2021 meetings

The following dates were agreed:

Wednesday 7 July  
Tuesday 7 September  
Monday 1 November  
Tuesday 21 December

8. Any other business

There was no other business.