

CUERDEN VALLEY PARK TRUST

Minutes of the 27th Annual General Meeting held on the 28th October 2019 at 7.00pm in The Visitor Centre, Cuerden Valley Park

Present:

Mr G W Sutton (Joint Chair)
Mr P Wagstaff (Joint Chair)
Mr C Hayton (Trustee)
Mrs M Hesmondalgh (Trustee)
Mr V Patel (Trustee)
Ms S Marsden (Trustee)
Dr A Service (Trustee)
Mr N Whitham (Trustee)
Mr D Beattie (Trustee)
Mr D Gardner (Trustee)
Mrs J Stainton (Prospective Trustee)
Mr J Stainton (Honorary Life Member)
Mr J Kay (Honorary Life Member)
Mr J Phillips (Member & Company Secretary)
Mr S Thorpe (Trust General Manager)
Mrs T Billups (Member)
Mr G Thompson (Member)
Mrs A Whitham (Member)
Mr D Weedon (Member)
Mrs C Madden (Member)
Mr V Cox (Member)
Mr J Spickett (Member)
Ms C Shirtliff (Member)
Mrs J Clark (Member)

In Attendance: Mr S Gardiner (John Goulding & Co-Accountants)

Absent:

1. Apologies for absence:

Mr S Nelson (Trustee), Ms S Booth (Trustee), Mrs L Phillips (Member), Cllr D Forest (Member), Mrs V Seed (Member), Mr G Hogbin (Member), Mrs M Hogbin (Member), Ms S Taylor (Member), Mrs B Higham (Member), Mr P Higham (Member), Ms D McKernan (Member), Mr J Procter (Member), Ms J Spink (Member), Mrs S Tuffrey (Member), Mr C Wragg (Member), Mr P Walmsley (Member), Ms E Blaymires (Member), Mr M Green (Member), and Mrs M Green (Member).

2. Presentation to Members

ST gave a short presentation to the members detailing the progress made and work completed during the year.

Cafe

The Café has had an excellent first 12 months trading, greatly exceeding expectations. The turnover was significantly above forecast but whilst profits were good, there was still room for improvement. There have been set up costs which will not be repeated in future years and indications are that performance in the early part of this financial year continues to be strong, with turnover in excess of that in the same period last year.

He commented on the contribution made by the Café to the local economy, as it now employs 20 full and part time staff as well as sourcing much of its produce from local suppliers. The success of the Café meant that it was necessary to implement a restructure in July 2019 replacing the Café Manager with an Operations Manager whose role is to manage and develop the business rather than being directly involved in the kitchen.

The first year's profits have been donated to the Trust in accordance with company and charitable practice, and will be used towards the upkeep of the Park.

Human Resources

ST commented on and thanked all volunteers for their contributions and considerable efforts without which the Park could not function. Over 700 volunteer days were recorded in the 12 month period which would equate to in excess of £80,000 of paid work. CVPT now employs 9 people (7.6 Full Time Equivalent) having expanded the Ranger team during the year.

Park Maintenance

ST reminded those present that the concentration of efforts in building and completing the Visitor Centre in previous years has meant that maintenance work throughout the rest of the Park has fallen behind. The catch up has started but ST acknowledged that there is still some way to go to be where he would like. Notwithstanding this, the Park has achieved its 11th consecutive Green Flag Award.

The oak trees on the path from the Town Brow car park have been thinned to allow those remaining to flourish. The timber has been used for benches and fence posts throughout the Park. With regret ST reported that the tree housing the iconic green man has had to be felled as it had become rotten and potentially dangerous. The head has been relocated to the Visitor Centre garden.

Chorley Ramblers provided funding for four new galvanised kissing gates throughout the Park which have now been installed. Littering has become an increasing problem as the Park is visited by more and more people. The Rangers are now emptying the bins twice daily on busier days.

Conservation

The river has been successfully restocked with fish by the Environment Agency following a pollution incident during the year. CVPT continues to be an active partner

in the River Douglas Partnership. Invasive species, in particular Himalayan Balsam, continues to be a problem. This cannot be solved in isolation as seeds spread easily on the wind and down the river. The Partnership is drawing up a strategic plan to address the issue. In the meantime, efforts will continue around the Park, focusing on those areas away from the river where better results might be expected.

Education

The schools programme continues to be popular, particularly throughout the spring and summer months. There have been visits from both primary and secondary schools as well as home education groups. Forest camps are now a regular feature of half term holidays and continue to be very well received. CVPT continues to participate in the NCS scheme for 16 to 17 year olds as well as taking student placements from Myerscough College.

Events

This year the Park has hosted regular Farmers Markets, a Circus, Badger Runs, a Gruffalo day, Willow Weaving Course, Bat Walks, Room on the Broom, a Spooky Walk and participated in the Scarecrow Festival.

CVPT has now taken on responsibility for the two weekly Health Walks in association with the Ramblers Association following the withdrawal of Chorley Borough Council. These walks often attract in excess of 60 participants. There are also Nordic walks and Parkruns taking place weekly around the Park.

Grants

ST acknowledged the fantastic support received from the Friends during the year. They have provided funding for new computers, deck chairs and the new Town Brow bridge. CVPT has also been successful in becoming one of the three local charities nominated to receive funding from the Co-op Community fund over the next 12 months. ST encouraged everybody to register as a member with the Coop and select CVPT as their chosen charity. By doing so, a small percentage of everything they spend at the Coop over the next 12 months will be donated to the Trust. This will be further publicised on social media in the coming weeks.

An application is about to be made for grant funding to assist with the construction of a new path leading down from the Visitor Centre through the field to the wooden bridge. The existing path from the Pinetum continues to suffer with the effects of heavy rain making it muddy and at times difficult to navigate. In addition to the path, the project will also incorporate a new wildflower meadow in the field and the creation of a pond to alleviate flooding and provide a space for Education to use away from public interruptions. There will be additional disabled parking spaces created, repairs to the wooden bridge and the paths in the Orchard and the Pinetum.

Funding for the £55k project will be requested from the Lancashire Environmental Fund and the Clayton le Woods Parish Council Community Infrastructure Levy.

Estate Management

There have been significant and expensive repairs needed to both the reservoir culvert and the bridge at Factory Lane where weight restrictions have now been imposed. Fly tipping continues in the area near to the Greenwood entrance and a community clean up day has been arranged in conjunction with Clayton Parish Council's litter picking team and Chorley Borough Council's street clean team to help alleviate the problem.

Sue Ryder will be leaving Cuerden Hall at the end of the year and the future of the property is uncertain. The Glendale property remains empty and is starting to deteriorate. Both these properties being empty could have repercussions for the Park if they attract vandals or criminal activity.

How are we Doing?

CVPT has received a certificate of Excellence from Tripadvisor, another Green Flag Award and the Café has a 5 star food hygiene rating. Last month over 27,000 members of the general public were reached through social media and this resulted in over 8,500 engagements. This does not include any contacts made through Friends or Cafe sites.

Last Year

ST set out 7 aims for the forthcoming 12 months when speaking at the AGM in 2018. He acknowledged that not all these had been achieved due the amount of time he has spent focusing on the establishment of the Café which proved much more onerous than anticipated.

He has still to deliver a medium and long term strategy for the Trust, roll out more newly branded signage, and produce a feasibility study for Lower Wood End Farm, though work on this is underway.

Next Year

In the forthcoming 12 months the aims are –

- To break even as budgeted with a view to establishing healthy reserves in the future.
- Achieve Green Flag Award status for the twelfth consecutive year
- Maintain and enhance the Cafes reputation
- Increase engagement with the Friends
- Secure Grant funding for projects in the Park
- Publish a new ten year strategy
- To develop a masterplan for future developments including Lower Wood End Farm, Stag Lodge and others.

In closing, ST asked if there were any questions. CM raised concerns expressed by a number of health walkers that in paying for 2 hours parking they had insufficient time to meet, undertake the walk and have a drink in the Café without risking being fined for overstaying. PW answered saying that parking arrangements are under review and consideration would be given to increasing the shortest stay period from 2 to 3 hours.

ST will talk to health walk leaders about a previous suggestion that health walkers be able to buy an annual ticket for Tuesdays and Thursdays only at a reduced cost.

There being no further questions the business of the meeting continued.

3. Minutes of AGM held on 29th October 2018

The minutes of the 26th Annual General Meeting were approved and signed as a true and correct record.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

5. General Business

a) Chairman's Report

PW welcomed everybody to the meeting and started by commenting on the loss which had been made during the previous year's trading which was due to the final costs in connection with the completion of the Visitor Centre building and the increased maintenance costs due to the extra works undertaken around the Park, to alleviate the backlog which have arisen whilst the Trust's efforts were concentrated on the new building. He continued saying that whilst any loss is disappointing, the aim this year was for the budget to balance and that to date the Trust was on target to achieve this.

He warned about the possibility of further substantial spending being needed on the reservoir and Factory Lane Bridge which emphasised the inadequacy of the initial endowment and the ongoing need for CVPT to consider all means possible to increase revenue streams.

He closed by thanking all the Volunteers, Staff and Trustees for all their efforts and hard work throughout the year, making special mention of the contribution made by John Stainton in delivering the new Visitor Centre and Café. The new building has provided the opportunity for the Park to generate significantly more community engagement and income, and will go a long way to securing the future of the Park for years to come. He also thanked the Café Board for their time and effort in establishing and launching the Café which has proved so successful and popular with visitors to the Park.

b) Approval of Accounts as at 31st March 2019

Stephen Gardiner presented the Finances to the meeting together with the Trustees Report and the Financial Statement which had been accepted by the Trustees at their meeting on 30th September 2019.

GS asked for a proposal to approve the accounts.

Proposal: To approve the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2019

Proposed: David Beattie
Seconded: Conrad Hayton
The proposal was approved unanimously

c) Appointment of Auditors:

Proposal: To approve the appointment of R P Smith trading as John Goulding & Co as the Trusts' Auditors and for their fees to be approved.

Proposed: Maureen Hesmondhalgh
Seconded: Carmel Madden
The proposal was approved unanimously

d) Election of Directors

Proposal: Re-election of existing Trustees who have agreed to stand for a period of three years: Vipul Patel, Peter Wagstaff, Conrad Hayton and Susan Marsden.

GS asked if there would be any objection to re-electing the four en-masse. There being none, the proposal was put forward that all 4 be re-elected together

Proposed Anne Service
Seconded Neville Whitham
The proposal was approved unanimously

Proposal: Election of a new Trustee, Jean Stainton who has agreed to stand for a period of three years:

Proposed David Beattie
Seconded Susan Marsden
The proposal was approved unanimously

GS welcomed JS to the Board.

e) Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

PW and GS relinquished control of the meeting at this point. CH took over as Chair and declared that nominations have been received for both Glenn Sutton and Peter Wagstaff as Chair and Vice Chair and also to continue as Joint Chairmen as was the case this year. GS and PW have both indicated their preference to continue as Joint Chairmen.

CH put the proposal that Glenn Sutton and Peter Wagstaff be appointed joint Chairmen for the forthcoming 12 months.

Proposal: Election of Glenn Sutton and Peter Wagstaff as joint Chairmen for one year

Proposed Vipul Patel

Seconded Susan Marsden
The proposal was approved unanimously

f) Merger of the Friends of Cuerden Valley Park with Cuerden Valley Park Trust

GS and PW resumed the Chair. GS continued saying that following full discussions, both the Friends and CVPT have voted in favour of the merger at their respective meetings. The Friends Group and their management Committee is to be dissolved and a new Friends Committee as part of CVPT is to be elected. The Terms of Reference for the new Committee specifies that a maximum of three Trustees of CVPT can serve on the Friends Committee at any one time and that DB, JS and SM have all indicated that they would like to form part of the new Friends Committee.

There are 9 other places available on the new Friends Committee and nominations have been received for Jack Spickett, Geoff Thompson, Sheila Tuffrey, Elizabeth Blaymires and Dave Weedon all of whom are willing to serve.

Proposal: Election of members for the new Friends Committee who have agreed to stand for a period of one year: Jean Stainton, Susan Marsden, David Beattie, Jack Spickett, Geoff Thompson, Sheila Tuffrey, Elizabeth Blaymires and Dave Weedon

GS asked if there would be any objection to electing the eight en-masse. There being none, the proposal was put forward that all 8 be elected together

Proposed Carmel Madden
Seconded Janet Clark
The proposal was approved unanimously

GS continued saying that Jean Stainton had been nominated to act as Chair of the Friends Committee. JS indicated her willingness to undertake the role.

Proposal: Election of Jean Stainton as Chair of the Friends Committee for one year

Proposed Susan Marsden
Seconded Janet Clark
The proposal was approved unanimously

GS continued saying that Jean Stainton had been nominated to act as Membership Secretary of the Friends Committee. JS indicated her willingness to undertake the role.

Proposal: Election of Jean Stainton as Membership Secretary of the Friends Committee for one year

Proposed Susan Marsden
Seconded Janet Clark
The proposal was approved unanimously

GS continued saying that Susan Marsden had been nominated to act as Treasurer of the Friends Committee. SM indicated her willingness to undertake the role.

Proposal: Election of Susan Marsden as Treasurer of the Friends Committee for one year

Proposed Alison Whitham

Seconded Dave Weedon

The proposal was approved unanimously

GS continued saying that a Vice Chair would be needed in the absence of the Chair. Jack Spickett had been nominated to act as Vice-Chair of the Friends Committee.

Proposal: Election of Jack Spickett as Vice Chair of the Friends Committee for one year

Proposed David Beattie

Seconded Susan Marsden

The proposal was approved unanimously

6. Vote of Thanks

GS thanked every one for their attendance and support.

Janet Clark offered thanks on behalf of the members to the board of Trustees for their continued hard work, much of which goes unseen, and also to the staff and volunteers without whom the Park could not survive.

GS thanked JC and closed the 27th AGM at 8.15pm.