

Minutes of the Fairfield Association meeting held on Wednesday 16th September at Thorneycroft

Present: Jon Barry, Andrew Brennand (chair), Jo Clark, Sam Edge, Oliver Fulton (mins), Simon Gershon, Ruth Haigh.

Apologies: Helen Hicks, Henry Hicks, Jude Naish, Michael Sheppard, Hilary Short, Mick Short, Jean Stuart, [Margaret Burtonwood: Margaret has indicated that she will not be attending meetings from now on but will continue to volunteer in the Orchard].

✍ Jo and Sam were welcomed to their first meeting.

Minutes: approved.

Matters arising

- ✍ Simon reported that repairing the defective tea urn will cost £60, which did not seem good value for money since it is likely to be used only on Fun Day. He proposed that it should be donated to Lancaster Green Spaces, which would be willing to repair it and lend it back for Fun Day, at a small charge to cover gas and wear and tear. This was agreed subject to Andrew checking with Jude that we are within our rights to give it away.
- ✍ Plaque installation. Andrew found three possible installers and asked for quotes. One has ceased trading, one has failed to quote despite numerous reminders, one has quoted £700. It was agreed that this seemed excessive and Andrew will look further.
- ✍ Dog fence round playground. As agreed, Andrew has written to Melanie Forrest to say we stand by our decision of some years ago that this is not needed.
- ✍ Andrew has also told Melanie that we like her suggestion of official signs pointing to each end of the Orchard. No signs have yet arrived.

FAUNA

Oliver reported on latest developments. He has met with Lucia Marquart, who was generally very encouraging about FAUNA, but warned that it would be extremely difficult to raise money for a community centre in this location in the present economic climate. She recommends bidding for FAUNA plus a modest building directly linked with the needs of the nature reserve (probably essential facilities plus a small meeting room), to the Access to Nature fund which has a newly-revised deadline for preliminary bids of January 31, 2010. She will support us in preparing the bid and she has offered £15,000 from the County Council from a fund for reclaiming and improving brownfield land, which could be used to clear the old pigsties and prepare the site for building. It would also count for match funding for the Access to Nature bid. If we are to bid, it will be essential to have a written agreement from the City Council to lease the land to us – which will also require them to come to a definite agreement with Robin Loxham by the deadline. Jon Barry has asked Graham Cox (head of Property Services) to confirm that this will be possible, but has received an inconclusive reply from Ann Wood, who has been handling FAUNA. Lucia has suggested that we and she, with Jon, should meet with Heather McManus (Head of Regeneration at the City Council) to move things along. Lucia also has concerns

about the possible costs, both of compensation for terminating the existing lease and of our future lease: the County is happy to support us but does not wish to see its money in effect passed over to the City. Jon pointed out that this would be a change from the City Cabinet's original decision and so would require delicate negotiation, given the present state of Lancaster's finances. After discussion it was agreed to welcome the County's offer of support, and to take up Lucia's proposals. The community centre remains an aspiration for the future. Jon agreed to arrange the meeting with Heather McManus as a p. Oliver also reported that he and Mick had met with Robin Loxham, who remains very keen for FAUNA to go ahead. Simon mentioned the Quirk Report of 2007, a central government-commissioned report which provided encouragement for local authorities to hand over capital assets to voluntary groups.

Oliver explained that in order to bid we will also need plans and costings for the land and buildings by January 31. There are a number of loose ends in the original landscaping plans – for example, they do not include the paddock, the Environment Agency has imposed conditions which will mean modifications, and we may want to revisit and simplify the footpath plans, and undertake further enhancement of the site for wildlife (e.g. Robin Loxham tells us that he has water voles living on his land.) On behalf of the FAUNA steering group, Oliver asked for authorisation to spend up to £5,000 from the Association's funds on fees for landscape and building architects, to provide the necessary drawings and costings. Andrew pointed out that the FA has justified the size of its current reserves as being needed for FAUNA, and that it would be reasonable to spend them for this purpose. Simon said that our reserves represent considerable fund-raising efforts by members and we should not spend them unless there is no alternative. After discussion it was agreed to authorise spending up to £5,000: in return Oliver undertook that every effort would be made to find other sources for the fees.

There will also need to be a public consultation of some kind before 31 January.

Treasurer's Report:

Jude sent a brief verbal report: the latest accounts are not available, but there was no significant change since July. The Kwik Cricket match was reported to have made approximately £85 less refreshment expenses: in other words, it did better than break even.

In discussion in the FAUNA steering group, Hilary Short had suggested that we need to have a better idea of possible liabilities (e.g. for urgent playground repairs), and that it would help in explaining the size of our accumulated reserves if we could label part of them as a 'contingency fund'. It was agreed that Hilary should be encouraged to take this further, in conjunction with the Treasurer.

Membership: 2 new/renewed memberships – reminder forms for the new subscription year have only just gone out. Andrew and Ruth hope to organise a subscription drive and will meet shortly to discuss this.

Orchard: The Orchard sub-group has met in July, August and September. Other than routine matters, it has mainly been dealing with vandalism and fly-tipping; the Breathing Places grant; and Apple Day. Oliver reported that we are broadly on course to spend the BP grant by the deadline of December 15.

Simon asked for authorisation to spend £20 on gloves for volunteers: agreed.

Playground: no report from Henry – Andrew to check with him on his return from holiday. The City Council has done its latest inspection and reported no problems. Hilary is liaising with the suppliers to obtain the new speed limiter (?) for the merry-go-round. This will cost approx. £500. There are gradually increasing amounts of graffiti – Andrew hopes to find a volunteer among the regular parents to help clean it off.

Events:

Teddy Bear's Picnic cancelled as agreed.

Kwik Cricket was a great success, despite slightly reduced numbers of participants on the rescheduled date, with brilliant weather. There was a lot of enthusiasm for repeating it next year, but on a date earlier in the summer, provided the Girls' Grammar School will have us. There was enough cake, and bakers were thanked for their efforts.

Apple Day is being organised by Simon with support from the Orchard sub-group. Simon reported there are still a few gaps in his rota: Ruth offered to ring round for last-minute volunteers if Simon gives her the list of gaps.

Bonfire Night, Green Fair, Carol Singing (2 sessions): it's hoped that the usual volunteers will be available (Stephen Hoyland has already booked the St Nicholas Arcades carol slot). Next meeting to confirm arrangements.

Wassailing: Andrew is willing to organise again. Provisional date is January 16: Andrew will book a Morris side a s a p.

AOB: 1) Agreed that there should be a newsletter in October, mainly to advertise the upcoming events, possibly including a FAUNA consultation. Oliver to ask Hilary if she will edit it as usual.

2) Simon reported that some of the plants around the playground, probably including the oak tree, which has been damaged by children, need replacing. He would also like to buy mulch mats to protect them better, and woodchip to cover the mats. Agreed to authorise Simon to spend up to £50.

3) Simon reported that LESS has a new policy on use of its small marquee(s?): it will lend them at no charge to local food-related events (e.g. Apple Day), but will charge £10 for other events (eg Fun Day).

Next meetings:

Weds October 14: Lyndene, Sunnyside Close

Weds November 18: Thorneycroft, Fairfield Road