



## **Minutes of the Victoria Park Friends Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, 10 October 2023**

### **1. Attendance / Apologies**

Attendees:

Richard Desmond (Chair); Joanie Andrews (Treasurer); Nadia Payne (Assistant Treasurer); Stephen Payne; Gerry Matthews (Cycle lead); Terry Stewart; Wayne Baptiste; Wendy Robinson; Clare Barnett; Wendy Dennis; Sandra Docking (notes).

Dave Hime (Victoria Park Manager); Shenneth Brereton (Victoria Park Development Officer – Community) and Elizabeth Buckingham (Victoria Park Development Officer – Infrastructure).

#### **Apologies:**

Pat Turnbull; Cllr Asma Begum; Cllr Natalie Bienfait; Rev Richard Kirker; Bob Turley; Alexia Heap; Cllr Rachel Blake; Cllr Marc Francis.

### **2. Victoria Park Update / Questions VP Management Team**

Questions had been submitted via social media and email, where appropriate, answers were given by the Victoria Park team. These questions and answers were shared with the meeting and will be posted in full to the Facebook group. The paper is attached at the end of the minutes.

Additional comments to the questions were as follows:

**Toilets:** These are cleaned three times a day. However, the level of vandalism is very high, resulting in toilets being taken out of use. The Pavilion toilets should be completed by the end of November. The adult changing room has been vandalised and the keypad kicked off the door, this will take some time to rectify by the contractor.

It is hoped that the new concessions at Ron Cain Sports Pavilion and the Rose Garden (also known as Shaw Place) will be running soon.

**Grass at Terrace Gate:** The wild area at Terrace Gate is kept with long planting to increase biodiversity. It is managed for that purpose.

Speeding in the park: The security staff have been going faster than 5mph when locking up. They also use full headlights. Could they use dipped headlights? VP staff: Noted that people shouldn't be in the park then as locking up is two hours after the park officially closes. Does the use of full headlights impact the bat colonies in the park? VP Staff: There is a bat study being done now.

The lights at Crown Gate and Royal Gates are back. They are all new and use LEDs. There is still one to be replaced on Royal Gate east.

The loud music and roller skating at Gore Gate - what can be done? VP staff: The skating and jumping has calmed down. Environmental health has monitored the situation and reported back that the level of noise was of an acceptable standard.

The orchard trees need watering – what is happening? VP staff: They are on the schedule. This year has not been good for fruit. There is a tree planting in the park on 27 Oct as part of the Coronation celebrations and details will be coming out soon.

The cycle pump at Bonner Gate – it's not working. VP staff: We have spoken to TfL about it as it's theirs.

Cuts to Park budget. Are there any impacts? VP staff: Not so far. There is talk of a restructuring within departments. We'll keep you informed.

Sustainable Park: VP staff: there are improvements. There is an increase in biodiversity and pollinators. The electric points for ice cream vans are waiting to be installed as the park has had to wait for UK Power networks to carry out works. The ice cream vans should be able to plug into the electric network rather than run their motors in 2024.

Noted that the Environmental Impact fund money from AEG (£50K) is targeted specifically at Ecology in the Park. It's used to support planting. There's also a comprehensive survey for Bats, Birds and Animals plus biodiversity including soil sampling. The last baseline survey was in 2010.

After the APE (All Points East) event a specialist contractor is being used for preparation works. The company also carry out work other large festivals in Royal Parks. De-compaction verti draining was carried out before the event this year, and this has helped with the sward's recovery.

The roadways are now on the grass as previously, when Lovebox did the event, they used the internal roads and there were too many near misses with children and animals, so traffic is contained within the event site wherever possible.

Additional questions at the meeting were as follows:

APE/AEG/TH events/LS events.

The contract is under renewal and will likely be signed to cover a number of years. The possible income all goes to council funds, not the park. There continue to be issues with the toilets provided, getting the event down as quickly as possible and keeping the cross walk open. Noted that they worked on a Sunday this year, around park users. Is this safe?

#### Pagoda Bridge.

The restoration of the bridge has been started by the pillars being replaced with metal due to the original wooden ones rotting.

VP staff: The metal lasts longer than wood and is resistant to weathering. The metal worker is looking at a solution for the more decorative finials.

#### Pagoda drinking.

It was noted that there is drinking at the pagoda from 10am in the morning by groups of men. The speaker noted that there may be several issues as to why the drinkers gather there and underlying issues with the people themselves. It is certainly excluding others from using the area. Is this a displacement from areas in Hackney?

VP staff: The Park staff are attempting to keep the area clean and do hose it down. A dispersal order would be needed for legal purposes to clear the area. They will look into the feasibility of installing an additional CCTV camera, which would cover more of the area. The drinkers do try to avoid the existing CCTV. It was suggested that attendees who are members of their local police advisory groups (Safer Neighbourhood Teams) raise this with them. TS and GM said that they would do so.

#### Play equipment.

It had been noticed that the play equipment has wooden equipment replaced with metal. There seems to be a lower investment in play equipment. And older children need more challenge, and these seem less challenging. Is there any consultation about play equipment?

VP staff: The life expectancy of wood is about 10 years and costs more. The aim is to replace like for like. The play officer from the Parks department was meeting the team today. The officer has said that the equipment at the Pools gym is rated for older children – the manufacturer says that it meets the guidelines for children 7 plus. The park continues to invest in multiplay equipment. The V&A playground is specifically for younger children.

#### Boating Pond.

What is happening here? Is there still a boat club? VP staff: There is still a club operating every Sunday. They do meet with the park management about issues. The club would like more people to be interested in their activity. The park manager has said that they can't use hydroplanes and boats have to be electric.

The extra growth in the pond in the west is part of the sustainability agenda.

In the half term holidays there is the canoeing experience which is safe as the water is not deep. VP staff would always look at suggested uses.

Timing of meeting.

Noted that the time of the meeting is in the evening, and it is dark. Could the time or day of the meeting be moved? It might improve attendance. Chair: This can be looked at. It is October as that is when the group started. We will need to check the constitution and see what can be done.

Hackney Wick War Memorial.

The War Memorial is at the Cadogan Terrace end of the park. This is showing signs of deterioration. Will the Park undertake to renovate it? VP staff: They will look at it.

Control of Dogs.

There has been quite a bit about this on the Facebook group. What can the park staff do about this? The recent cases of a dog attacking a police horse had been very prominent. It was noted that the law supersedes any bylaws.

[https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/dangerous-dog-offences#:~:text=Under%20section%203\(1\)%20of,gUILTY%20of%20a%20summary%20offence.](https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/dangerous-dog-offences#:~:text=Under%20section%203(1)%20of,gUILTY%20of%20a%20summary%20offence.)

Gate signs vandalism.

There has been a lot of vandalism specifically on the signs. VP staff: We are very aware of this and are working with the police on this specific issue. The cost of replacing one interpretation on a large sign is about £2,000.

Exercise equipment.

This is by the tennis courts and is very popular. Is there any plan for more equipment? VP staff: If more funding becomes available, we will be able to look at this.

East Lake.

The lake has a lot of growth. VP staff: This is deliberate. It has increased the biodiversity of the lake and improved oxygenation. A very rare aquatic plant has been found as well. It's been surveyed by the Borough Biodiversity Officer and the water quality is good. They are investigating the possibility of installing a kingfisher bank.

Gates east end from Splash Pond.

The gates are always closed. Why is this? VP staff: The gates are closed to prevent dogs running into the splash pond area from the park and children running to the boating pond. This has happened in the past. The access to this area is via the main gate from the Pools Playpark.

### **3. Minutes of 2022 AGM**

The minutes were approved with the following correction:

In the Victoria Park update, where the statement was recorded as 'the Olympic Park facilities should have covered the sporting facilities that are in the park, that was the idea of the regeneration of that area'. The statement is amended to read as follows: 'Sport England took the decision not to fund sporting activities and spaces in the Park as the funding was diverted to the Olympic Park'. The speaker stated that it was a short-sighted decision in their view.

### **4. Chair's Report**

The Chair noted that this would be their 13<sup>th</sup> year as Chair. Volunteers are welcome to succeed him.

The Bulb planting, arranged with the Park, was well attended and went well. The tree planting, arranged by Trees for Cities, was successful and well attended by Park users.

The committee agreed to talk with Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Mile End Park and Meath Gardens groups about engaging with users and encouraging younger people to join the formal user groups. Mile End have a very good litter picking group activity, Meath Gardens are good at planting activities and Tower Hamlets CP does well with both corporate and community engagement (although they have a different model as they run the park under a lease from the Council).

It was suggested that contacting the Youth Mayors from Hackney and Tower Hamlets would be useful for engagement for the youth aspect. The speaker suggested that an engagement officer on the committee might be helpful. A co-option should be possible.

It was noted that Tower Hamlets has made a very large injection of funds (in this financial year at least) in youth activities.

Another way to engage with youth might be with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme for volunteering and skills, involving schools as well.

Another suggestion was to advertise to corporate enterprises and perhaps a Board on the Facebook group to match up resources with what the Park needs.

It was suggested that QR codes posted around the park to encourage people to post their pictures to the VPF Facebook group would help drive engagement. The group does post on Facebook and Twitter but does not have a social media presence elsewhere. The Chair noted that expanding the group's social media presence would take more time and effort and needs more people on the committee and that is the reason for a social media post in the elections.

The Chair noted that the shops in Lauriston Road had been generous when the Great Day Out was run. If it's run again, perhaps engagement with the local businesses can be improved.

The bandstand season was successful – 12 weeks and approx. 30 bands attended along with about 200 people on average listening to the bands. Thanks to Alexis for writing the successful funding application for the grant to cover the Pride Picnic.

The meeting noted the possible involvement of Make Space for Girls but there are funding issues as they are consultants and require funding for their work.

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

The meeting noted the healthy state of the accounts. The group applied for and received a grant for the Pride Picnic this year, for the first time. The group holds, as a matter of policy, £5,000 as a fighting fund from the Victoria Park Society, the original group founded to fight the proposal to put a road through the Park. This sum is held for the possibility of any legal action the group may have to take in future.

A suggestion from the meeting was that the Friends have a fundraiser as a separate post on the committee.

The Chair noted that as part of the report, he proposed a purchase of a speaker for the bands to be able to have feedback on their sound. A number of bands have requested this over the course of the bandstand season.

The meeting agreed the Treasurers report and accepted the accounts.

## **6. Future Plans for the group**

### **A. Bandstand Season**

This is planned for the usual 12-week season in 2024. There is volunteer group now for the activity and they will be meeting for a review session shortly.

### **B. Facebook Group**

This continues to work reasonably well, and it's noted that people do engage but normally on single issues.

### **C. Cycling Report**

GM, the Cycling lead, noted that the audit with Sustrans, the holders of network Route 1 through the Park is still outstanding. She will chase this up. There are a number of community pop up bike events. These need better communication and publicity as to when they are on and where. An example is the HGV awareness at Bonner Bridge on 11 Oct which hasn't been advertised widely. Bike Works do Weds and Sat in the Park and another provider is doing bike repairs in the park on Friday.

## **7. Elections**

Nominations were taken from the floor. All positions are for one year or until the next AGM.

Chair: Richard Desmond

Secretary: Sandra Docking

Treasurer: Joanie Andrews

Assistant Treasurer: Nadia Payne

Wheels Lead: Gerry Matthews

Note: the meeting agreed to the name change from Cycle lead to Wheels lead include all wheeled activities in the Park, such as roller skaters/bladers and skate boarders.

Bandstand lead: Richard Desmond

Media Lead: No volunteer at this time. Wayne Baptiste offered to advise on social media.

The Chair to follow up.

Committee Members: Wendy Robinson; Terry Stewart; Bob Turley

## **8. Any Other Business**

1. The park has won some awards recently; Gold in the London in Bloom and Gold in the Heritage section of the same competition. The People's Choice Award has closed for voting and the results will be announced in November.

2. The area used by the former 1 o'clock club has now been repurposed and a greenhouse is in place. There will be a soft launch shortly – please look out for it. It is named after Fanny Wilkinson, who was the first paid woman landscape designer. See here for details:

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/fanny-wilkinson/>

3. The Park staff were asked about the impact of bird flu on the park birds. There have been a few small outbreaks but only one or two birds at a time. If the outbreak is three or more, it is reportable. The Park staff are very aware of the impact on the bird population and always keep it under review.