

Abney Park Trust
Annual General Meeting Minutes
Location: Zoom
Date: 30th November 2022, 7.30pm



Attending:

Tom Walker, Chair
Nick Toner, Vice Chair, note-taker
Alison Bean, Treasurer
Patricia Wenz, Abney Unearthed volunteer
Charles Wenz
Judith Birch, volunteer from Abney Unearthed
Richard Allen
Val Munday, has family buried in Abney
Ann Barbara Brenells, park user
Brooke McKinnis, incoming Treasurer
Haydn S, Trust Co-ordinator
Ellie Roberts, Trustee
Barbara Taylor
Bernard Bourdillon, former Chair
Neil Morkunas, Chair - The Music Hall, Theatre and Film Guild
Cllr. Susan Fajana Thomas
John McShane, Trustee
Kate Harding
Martina Girvan, Trustee
Benjamin Pass, Trustee
Nick Perry
Lorraine Tillett, Abney Park User Group
Cllr. Fliss Premru

Apologies:

Irena Goldwag, Trustee

Items discussed

1. Introduction, welcome, and apologies
Tom Walker introduced the format of the Annual General Meeting.

2. Approval of minutes from AGM 2021

The minutes were unanimously approved. No questions were raised.

3. Review of the year from Nov 2020 to Nov 2021 and Annual Report April 2020 to March 2021 - Tom Walker, Chair

The review was given by Tom Walker (TW), chair following the structure and contents of the Annual Report.

Overview

- TW: Our objectives remain unchanged. We continue to have two committees

Covid 19

- TW: Events programming in both 20-21 and 21-22 were affected by lockdowns

Events

- TW: Events are the core of our work. Remembrance Sunday, Coronation Avenue commemoration and anniversary of the park all continued to be commemorated – plus tours from Haydn on Abney Unearthed, previous Trust Co-ordinator Zach in the chapel, Alan Gartrell's history walks and much more

Online and digital presence

- TW: We've reached many collaborators who want to share their skills, such as Lynn Dennison (videographer), through networking. This will build as chapel usage comes back

Grave searches

- TW: Haydn does fundamental work for APT. Grave searches are very important for helping piece together stories.

Monuments

- TW: relationship with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is strong. We're paid £4,000 p/a from CWGC, and maintenance is still in-house – with frequency of this maintenance rising. Thanks to John, Haydn and Zach. We'd like to explore more monument restoration

Restoration project

- TW: we don't lead on this. Project is a mixed blessing, and has affected our business – e.g. we haven't been able to do summer theatre. A lot has gone on during the year: excavation, trenching, stained glass window installation and much more. APT does work in the background including interpretation (signage), acting as a community voice and so on. Completion is expected around April/May 2023

Thank you

- TW: thank you to volunteers and trustees. We celebrated at the Clarence last month. We hope to do more thank you events soon

The future

- TW: a challenging period. Aim is to get the relationship with Hackney Council right. We'll have premises once the restoration is over, and we aim to collaborate to fill the space. The Activity Plan will involve paying a new member of staff (discussed further later in the meeting). The park will be transformed; not everyone will agree, but we've aimed to represent the community and ensure the changes don't lead to sanitisation. Overall, there's support for the Trust and a network behind it

Questions & comments

- Cllr. Susan Fajana Thomas (SFT): pointed out for discussion that we have trustees but also have Trust members
TW (responding): important point. Membership systems have lapsed in the past
Cllr. SFT: In the New Year, let's consider the role of members in voting
TW (responding): Agree. The members will vote later on the auditors, officers etc. Any help on membership structures from previous Trustees or members would be helpful
Bernard: Happy to help with this
Barbara: Is the tree walk on the 1st January happening?
TW (responding): Yes. We will promote it in our comms channels. Event notifications are on our website, social media and in our newsletter

4. Abney Unearthed project update - Haydn S, Trust Coordinator

HS: update on the Abney Unearthed (AU) project, which researches and maps the graves in the park, including the common graves, and adding them to databases:

- Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (now NLHF) and Hackney Council in December 2016. NLHF has given formal approval of the work done
- The Hackney Council cyberattack has caused some delays – but this is now moving after meetings with the council
- NLHF-funded restoration project at the park has meant that the AU project can continue for another two years
- Several sections were never mapped at all – but in recent years we have made lots of progress. Missing records from the early 1970s were damaged by water, which is relevant because most grave search enquiries today are about this period. There's now an increased focus on people in common graves
- Project access points have been simplified. Huge thanks to the volunteers: attendance has averaged between 12 and 15 people per week. Just under 3,000 hours of

volunteer time has occurred between November 2021 and November 2022. Almost half of the site is now covered

- We're also correcting personal details of people such as names. We've covered 12,568 actual graves, and added 592 graves through the maps. Haydn delivered "Lost at Sea" tour recently (in 22-23 period), which was sold out
- To the future: we're looking forward to continuing this and doing more outreach

Questions & comments:

- TW: thank you for the brilliant summary. Haydn works for APT mainly, but for the council on this AU project. Lots of passion and enthusiasm from volunteers
- Lorraine Tillett: what action does Hackney Council take when gravestones are dangerous? Are any of these re-grounded or are they just noted as tumbling/dangerous?
- HS (responding): the Council makes decisions depending on risk, location and danger. It also prioritises grand monuments and those which need laid down. Some plans (by APT) are underway for prioritising and funding repair of monuments – which is a work in progress
- TW: if anyone can help us build our networks to support this work, please let us know
- Neil Morkunas: this work is very important. How sustainable is the project, and what plans are there for funding afterwards?
- HS (responding): this is being thought about. Currently we are funded by NLHF and also via the Activity Plan
- TW: if the funding for this comes via the NLHF ends, the Trust would aim to fund this via seeking external funding
- Bernard: Jon Price, who was important in checking safety, has left. This is a real problem
- HS (responding): monument safety checks are happening now
- Val: do the common graves have individual headstones?
- HS (responding): not every person in a common grave has a headstone

5. Annual accounts report April 2021 - March 2022: Alison Bean, Treasurer

Alison Bean reported on accounts.

Accounts located here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1MRUxgo0DDCHI2LrNzsOyAdDzWeDbEjmE>

- AB: in this period we have kept spending under control, maintained good reserves and we are in surplus. The independent examiner is happy with this
- AB: on headline income, regular Hackney Council and Commonwealth War Graves Commission grants arrived. We received £15,000 in further grants from Hackney Council, and a donation from Whole Foods. We received several thousand from the public in donations, down a little on last year. Some income raised from merchandise sales, although none from theatre
- Support costs decreased slightly in 2021/2022, as priorities shifted and savings were made.
- Staff continued to work at home for much of this period, and following a significant investment in IT equipment the previous year, we spent a lot less on that in this financial year.
- Staff costs increased slightly in this year due to changes in job roles and personnel.
- TW: we were prudent with how we used money from Covid grants. Challenges include deciding objectives in fundraising, future models and more

6. Discussion of annual report and accounts

Questions & comments

- Neil Morkunas: £16,000 from Hackney went into restricted funds. What were the conditions?
- AB (responding): we had to spend that on core costs, and achieved that
- Neil: what was the staffing structure?
- AB (responding): we recruited someone but it didn't work out and are now deciding what to do next
- Val: what were the redundancy obligations?
- AB (responding): it's prudent to set aside money for redundancy, but we don't have any intention to do this currently
- Lorraine: do we know when there will be a full-time member of staff to complement Haydn's role?
- TW (responding): soon - before Christmas - we will put out an advert for a role to run the Activity Plan, plan events and make the most of the new spaces. One possible model is this role, Haydn's role, and an administration role. The recruitment market is challenging – so we'll need attendees' help for promoting this. We won't need a front desk presence when the renovation happens [POST MEETING NOTE - advert to be delayed until new year]
- TW: Alison is standing down as Treasurer. Thank you to Alison who has transformed the way finances are run. Brooke McKinnis will be taking over – welcome to Brooke

Financial accounts formally approved
Financial report formally approved

7. Election of Trustees & Officers

Lorraine Tillett nominated trustees and officers for re-election, and John McShane seconded.

The following Trustees were unanimously re-elected to the Board by those present at the meeting, with no objections raised:

Tom Walker, Chair
Nick Toner, Deputy Chair
Alison Bean, Treasurer (outgoing)
Cllr Susan Fajana Thomas
Cllr Fliss Premru
Martina Girvan
Irena Goldwag
John McShane
Ben Pass
Ellie Roberts
Ali Rulton-Reed

8. Appointment of independent inspectors of accounts

No objections were raised on the re-appointment of JS2 to the position, and this was passed unanimously.

9. Appointment of Company Secretary

Nick Toner was re-appointed as Company Secretary, with no objections raised.

10. Any other business

- TW: call for volunteers. Anyone with ideas for projects can come forward
- Neil: there's an inadvertent impression that the Trust has been sidelined by Hackney Council. What influence does the Trust have with the council and what will this look like in the future?
- TW (responding): overall, we're optimistic. This is a big period of change. Covid posed restrictions, and the project is complex – the Trust couldn't do something like that. The model is different now compared to when the Trust was more involved in management. We'd like more info from the council. Discussions about the model are ongoing. We need to make sure we fundraise and remain going concern – small amounts of money can make a big difference to our funding flow
- Cllr. Fliss Premru: there was the open conversation about the cafe tender which I believe is resolved now
- Cllr. Susan Fajana Thomas: the Council took over the management from the Trust because it went to Historic England Risk Register and also other issues
- Lorraine: are the Church Street gates open?
- TW (responding): no. They opened on Monday. Best efforts were made to make the ramp safe – but more temporary work needed. Lots of social media reaction. But Hackney Council are working fast
- Kate Harding: the sign now says the gates are closed until further notice, which looks despondent
- TW (responding): we've spoken to the Council and they're hoping for next week for re-opening
- Bernard: what are the plans for management, especially nature management? Is the Trust aware of how the plans are developing? Are you able to be involved enough in the preparation of these?
- TW (responding): Russell Miller, adviser to the project, has a deep knowledge and has done lots of work. Martina Girvan, APT trustee, is an expert in the field and is building an ecology network. Council is focused on project launch – we feel it may be a post-project launch question. We're in the conversation but we don't have the autonomy. Discussions continue around dog walking and so on
- Lorraine: the Development Board is an interim player for concerns about the Park
- Martina Girvan: we had a good fungal foray, and have ideas about natural capital accounting, carbon management and dog usage. Aim is to feed this into Hackney Council's ecological management plan (currently being drafted)