



FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting
Held on Friday 18th November 2022 in St Mary's Handbridge Centre,
St. Mary's Without-the-Walls. CH4 7HL
at 7.00pm

25 Members were present.

1. Apologies

Stephanie Hefferan (Greenspace Officer), Julie Rose.

2. Minutes of 2021 AGM

Proposed, seconded and unanimously accepted as a true record.

3. Chair's Report

Chair, Julie Savory presented the following report:

Introduction and Welcome

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this year's AGM. And to see such a good turnout on a dark and cold November evening. The Covid lockdowns have made us all really appreciate being able to meet in person once more.

Our guest speaker, Chloe Aldridge will introduce us to the fascinating, but often overlooked, lives of the smaller wildlife all around us.

Interpretation Boards

At our meeting last year we were able to show you the designs for the Interpretation Boards which have now been able to install on The Meadows with help from a £2K grant from the Postcode Lottery and some extra funding from the councillors budget to fund installation.

The aim of the Boards is to generate more appreciation of the history of The Meadows, their role in flood prevention and the biodiversity they provide so close to the city centre. They also include mention Phyllis Brown, who along with her husband, purchased the Meadows 93 years ago and covenanted them 'in perpetuity' to the people of Chester for their recreation.

Black Poplar Information Board

We have also this year installed a board which provides information about the 4 black poplar trees which were planted in 2018

A huge thankyou to everyone who was involved in bringing the interpretation board and the black poplar boards project to fruition. Particularly Rachel and James and Stephen.

Walks on The Meadows

This year we organised a series of 4 botany walks on The Meadows.

These were led by Martyn Stead a very experienced local botanist. The walks were very well attended and it was wonderful to see the variety of plant life there is. We are hoping to run, with Martyn's support, more botany walks during 2023.

A walk around the Meadows was also provided as part of the Civic Trust's Heritage week programme, which again was very well attended.

Management of The Meadows

We continue to work closely with Stephanie Hefferan, the Council's Greenspace officer to preserve and maintain the Meadows for both human recreation and as an area of unspoilt grassland important in terms of the biodiversity it provides so close to the city centre.

Paths: At last year's AGM I confirmed that Stephanie had been successful in gaining funding from the Council to carry out repair work to some of the paths. The first area to be repaired was the central path and the riverside path to the entrance with improvement to the Bottoms Lane path also taking place during the year.

Waterworks repairs: There are ongoing issues with leaking pipes and the need to replace a water pump. Stephanie is working closely with Severn Trent to ensure that these repair works cause minimum disruption.

Grazing: For the time being, a decision regarding reintroducing grazing by cattle, has been postponed indefinitely. As a committee we remain disappointed as conservational cattle grazing would have the benefit of enhancing the biodiversity of the Meadows in a way that mechanical mowing cannot. We do appreciate that it is necessary to balance the need to preserve and promote biodiversity with the role of the Meadows as a recreational space for people but are continuing to discuss with relevant parties if a way forward could be found that would enable grazing to be introduced in an appropriate way.

We would welcome views from members on this and may early next year hold a **special meeting** to discuss further.

General maintenance: Stephanie has organised volunteers to coppice the willows opposite Deva Terrace. In July Andy organised a Himalayan balsam bashing working party.

Owl Box

One owl box has been fixed in place and another is planned.

Future projects.

- **Tree saplings** for the empty tree guards.
- **Work with the zoo** – I have attended a Wildlife Champions course delivered by the Zoo and we hope to link into their work to provide a 10 mile Nature Recovery Corridor around Chester.

We would also welcome suggestions from members for next year's expenditure. Please mention any suggestions to members of the committee tonight or email or message us through the FoM website.

Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan

Keith Dixon, our treasurer, is representing FoM on the Green Spaces and Conservation Group.

Newsletter

Our thanks go to Rachel Cross for producing four excellent newsletters a year, one for each season.

Thanks also to Ruth Davidson and our team of volunteers for delivering the newsletters.

Website and Facebook We are grateful to Rachel for maintaining the website and Andy Ingham for managing the Facebook page.

Andy continues to monitor the comings and goings of the wildlife, especially the birds, that spend time of the Meadows.

Membership

We currently have a membership of approximately 158. Membership costs £5.00 per household and we are very grateful for the additional donations totalling £879.00 made by Friends which contributes significantly to supporting the various projects and tasks we undertake to look after The Meadows.

Thanks go to Richard for his work as membership secretary, to James Holroyd for his patience and sterling work as secretary and to Keith Dixon for his work as Treasurer.

If any members are interested in becoming more actively involved, either as a committee member or by helping out with Meadows maintenance working groups, please get in touch.

We are planning to introduce bimonthly walks around the Meadows to identify any tasks that need to be undertaken.

The first walks will be in the new year, early evening, starting in mid/late February when the days start to get a bit longer. Dates will be posted in the noticeboards and included in the next newsletter.

4. Treasurers Report

Treasurer, Keith Dixon presented the Accounts and outlined the main points, which were approved *nem. con.* – see details below.

ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED SEPTEMBER 30th 2021

	2019/20 £	2020/21 £
Receipts		
Subscriptions/Donations	1,115.00	1,639.00
Grants	-	2,300.00
Total Receipts	1,115.00	3,939.00
Payments		
Printing Newsletters	272.67	442.12
Post and Packaging	60.84	125.06
Website	-	78.00
Planning Approval for Notice Boards	270.50	284.80
Meeting Expenses	50.00	-
Room Hire	27.00	-
Insurance	76.16	90.72
Total Payments	757.17	1,020.70
Surplus of Receipts over Payments	357.83	2,918.30
Balance Brought Forward	3,776.89	4,134.72
Add Surplus for the Year	357.83	2,918.30
Balance Carried Forward	4,134.72	7,053.02

- The Receipts and Payments Account for the year 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021, (2020/21) shows that our Bank Balance at Barclays has increased by £2,918.30 to £7,053.02.
- Comparisons with the previous year, (2019/20) are affected by COVID which severely curtailed our activity that year, as can be seen from the Accounts.

- Subscriptions and Donations have returned to a full year level. Based on a current membership of some 152 households with a subscription of £5 each, Subscriptions totalled £760. The balance of £879 represents Donations made by Friends in excess of £5, for which we are very grateful.
- Grants have been received from the Postcode Lottery Trust of £2,000 and from the Council's Local Budget Area Scheme of £300. These are to meet the cost of installing the Meadows Information Boards during 2021/22. This will then reduce our Bank Balance to a more normal level.
- A full programme of 4 newsletters was produced in 2020/21, compared with 2 the previous year.
- Planning approval was sought in 2020/21 for an information board for the black poplars we planted in February 2018. The previous year's successful application was for the Meadows Information Boards.
- Looking forward, the estimated total cost of installing the Information Boards is about £2,750, and installing the Black Poplar Board about £1,300. Should the total be met then our balance would reduce by a little over £4,000 by next September. However we are working closely with our local Councillors and County Officers to minimise the net cost to the Friends, thereby maintaining the bank balance at a prudent and sensible level to meet our future plans.

5. Election of Officers

The following officers were once more elected unanimously:

Chair	Julie Savory
Secretary	James Holroyd
Treasurer	Keith Dixon
Membership Secretary	Richard Cain
Meadows Log	Andy Ingham
Newsletter Editor	Rachel Cross
Newsletter Dist. Co-ord'r	Ruth Davidson
Committee	Julie Rose

6. Any Other Business

Cattle on the Meadows

It was observed that five or six Dexter cattle on the Meadows would preserve the space as water meadows, keeping down the scrub. At present, they have almost reached the point of no return.

Comments from the floor: in order to avoid conflict between dog walkers and environmental needs some fencing would be needed to keep cattle separate from dogs. This implies funding.

Despite the fact that there have been cattle on the Meadows very recently, the Council may be unwilling to accept the risk of injury to the public.

The Chair took away the action to arrange a meeting in the New Year, specifically to gauge views of local people.

Following the AGM, there was a talk by Chloe Aldridge on:

The Small Stuff – the Fascinating Lives of the Wildlife all around us.