



FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting

Held on Friday 24th November 2023 in St Mary's Handbridge Centre,

St. Mary's Without-the-Walls. CH4 7HL

at 7.00pm

22 Members were present.

1. Apologies

Stephanie Hefferan (Greenspace Officer), Richard Cain, Rachel Cross, Andy Ingham, Ruth Davidson.

2. Minutes of 2022

Proposed, seconded and unanimously accepted as a true record.

3. Chair's Report

Julie Savory presented the following report:

Introduction

We were very pleased to welcome 15 members to our 2022/23 AGM which took place on Friday 24th November at St Marys Handbridge Centre.

The meeting included the formal AGM business of the Chair's report, Treasurer's report and re-election of officers followed by a talk by our guest speaker, Tim Ackerley a summary of which is included in this newsletter.

In 2022 we were very busy with the projects of installing the Interpretation Boards and the Black Poplar Interpretation Board. This year has been quieter in terms of hands on practical projects but we are currently developing plans for next year.

Tree planting project

The main project that we are working on is to plant some more trees along the path at the far end of The Meadows, between the water board mound and the ferrya dn we are setting aside some funds for this work.

We had become concerned that saplings planted in some of the tree guards have not thrived and that there are also a number of empty tree guards.

Keith has mapped out what is currently in that area in terms of existing trees and tree guards and in November some members of the committee met with Stephanie Hefferan, the Council's Greenspace officer, to discuss how best to proceed. We also sought advice from Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Chester Zoo's biodiversity co-ordinator about which species of trees are more likely to thrive in that area.

Possible trees which could be planted include oak, hawthorn and rowan.

Although we often refer to that area as 'the avenue', it is not a formal avenue as such and to keep it 'nature friendly' we may keep the dead trees that have fallen on their side as they provide homes and food for insects and other wildlife.

We will be looking for volunteers to help with planting the saplings once we are in a position to proceed. If you are interested in being involved, please do get in touch.

Botany Walks on The Meadows

This year we organised a series of 5 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 plantlife there is. We are hoping to run, with Martyn's support, more botany walks during 2024. Martyn is keeping a record of plant species identified which will help us to monitor trends in biodiversity on The Meadows.

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.

As a committee we remain concerned about reduced biodiversity on The Meadows following the loss of grazing in 2015. The willow scrub is continuing to spread and if not addressed the area could become more of a willow fen than a water meadow.

We have started to develop a record of existing plant species and have taken a photographic record of the willow spread to enable us to discuss with the council how best to maintain the Meadows. We also hope to work with Chester Zoo as part of their Networks for Nature Project.

Unfortunately Stephanie was on long term sick leave for several months which has made it harder to make as much progress as we would like but which has certainly made us appreciate the importance of the importance of active support from the council.

Paths.

In 2022, the year the council funded improvements to the central path and riverside path. Improvements to Bottoms Lane path also took place but unfortunately water run off has led to deterioration and this currently being assessed again by the Council's Asset team.

Eel Screens

Many of you will have noticed that a major project by Severn Trent is taking place on The Meadows resulting in interrupted access to the riverside path.

A number of Committee members met with Severn Trent to find out more. Information has been circulated to local residents by Severn Trent but basically Severn Trent are investing £3.6 million in upgrading eel screens (it is a statutory requirement) which will mean that different types of eels as well as other types of fish and wildlife are better protected. The work should be completed by March 2025.

Other activities include:

Butterfly Transect

Andy organised a weekly walk from April to end of October identifying and counting species on a set route.

17 butterfly species were recorded.

Small Copper had a good year with at least 3 broods throughout the summer

Small tortoiseshell had a poor year with only a couple of sightings on the transect.

A **litter picking event** took place and in addition some limited **balsam bashing** was undertaken by member of the committee

Owl Box

One owl box has been fixed in place and another is due to be installed.

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.

Meadows Log

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

Highlights include – barn owl spotted end of last winter, not seen yet this winter,

Cuckoo observed last Spring and huge increase in the range of the Cetti Warbler

Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan

Keith Dixon, represents FoM on the Neighbourhood Forum with particular reference to the Green Spaces and Conservation Group.

Summit of the Dee

The MP for Chester, Samantha Dixon, has set up an ongoing 'Summit of the Dee' bringing together interested parties to discuss problems about water quality and its impact. We are pleased to have been asked to take part as over the past few years we have reported a number of sewage and storm drain leakage incidents which have affected The Meadows.

Chester Zoo

We continue to nurture links with Chester Zoo and hope The Meadows will be part of the Networks for Nature Project. The Zoo has been awarded a lottery grant of £318K to help create and restore habitats for local wildlife

Membership

We currently have a membership of approximately 158. Membership costs £5.00 per household and we are very grateful for the additional donations 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.

This winter we will need help with the tree planting project.

We are also looking for a volunteer to organise regular (monthly or bi monthly) meetings on The Meadows to identify tasks that need carrying out and to help with organising working parties

4. Treasurers Report

Keith Dixon outlined the main points in the accounts, which were approved Nem. Con. – see details below.

FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED SEPTEMBER 30th 2023

	2022/23 £	2021/22 £
Receipts		
Subscriptions/Donations	1,649.00	1,622.50
Grant -Black Poplars Board	-	970.00
Total Receipts	1,649.00	2,592.50
Payments		
Printing Newsletters	545.52	498.90
Post and Packaging	81.64	113.91
Website	100.00	-
Donations	100.00	-
Cost and Installation-Meadows Information Boards	-	2,300.00
-Black Poplars Board	-	970.00
Meeting Expenses	48.76	86.95
Room Hire	42.00	37.50
Insurance	100.80	100.80
Total Payments	1,018.72	4,108.06
Surplus/(Deficit) of Receipts over Payments	630.28	(1,515.56)
Balance Brought Forward	5,537.46	7,053.02
Add Surplus/ Deduct (Deficit) for the Year	630.28	(1,515.56)
Balance Carried Forward	6,167.74	5,537.46

The Receipts and Payments Account for the year 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023, (2022/23) shows that our Bank Balance at Barclays has increased by £630.28 to £6,167.74. This year is not affected by the installation of the notice boards and reflects a more normal year's running cost

Subscriptions and Donations. Receipts in the year are up about 1.5% and total £1,649.00. Subscriptions have remained at £5 per household although many pay more with the addition being regarded as donations. These total about the same amount as the £5 subscriptions themselves.

Payments. Excluding payments relating to the notice boards, spending is up £180.66. Inflation has increased the cost of printing, and there have also been other price rises.

There have been two donations made recorded of £50; firstly, to Cheshire Wildlife Trust on behalf of Martyn Stead for his efforts leading the botanical walks; and secondly on behalf of our speaker at the last AGM who wanted her expenses donated to Record. The speaker at the previous year's AGM expenses (£50) are shown as part of the costs of the AGM in the 2021/22 accounts.

The costs of the website of £100 cover a two-year period and should not therefore arise in the current year.

There are some committed payments outstanding to meet the costs of installing owl boxes. In addition, the committee has set aside funds to meet planting trees in or near the existing tree guards on the Meadows. The balance carried forward into the current year is I believe still prudent and sensible to meet our current plans and commitments as well as the effect of inflation.

Keith Dixon (Treasurer)

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

6. Any Other Business

There was a call for volunteers to help with tree planting and other tasks

Following the AGM, there was a talk by Tim Ackerley on:

A Journey Down The River Dee: how it has provided drinking water of varying quality over the centuries
