



Minutes of The Friends of Cassiobury Park 51st Annual General Meeting

Meeting held on Wednesday 14th May 2025 at St. Luke's Church, Langley Way, Watford at 7:30 pm

Chair's Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed everyone for attending, including Isabel and Neil from the park management team, and for their continued support. Apologies will be listed in the minutes.

The Chair made a statement given he is standing down.

As you have been told at least a few times this will be my last AGM's Chair. When I retired in 2010, I was persuaded by my wife and ex-councillor Jill who was already on the committee to join as treasurer and membership secretary. Then, after eight years in those busy jobs when John Cox stepped down, I ended up as Chair. A role in which I have been fortunate to have an excellent hard-working committee who, by the way, contrary to some rumours, have not slung me out because I was mixing up naturalists with naturists at AGMs! Basically I felt with a big upcoming birthday, It was time to step down from what has been a long and enjoyable volunteering job, and one I hope that has contributed a bit to the welfare of our lovely park, the people who visit it, as well as the wildlife in the nature reserve and woodland.

The Chair then gave a general update:

- Membership is up as you will hear later.
- Funds are robust as you will hear from the treasurer later.
- We are now fully approved with the charity commission and have a registration number.
- We have acquired a number of new tools using our own funds as well as funds given to us via Veolia and others, latest orders are for slashers .
- Steve and Peter now have regular meetings on a monthly basis with the park management team. They are very useful to get updates and share our thoughts.
- Benches – new ones have been ordered and some are replacements. We have helped with funding and positioning of some of the benches. Some will be added to the lime walk.
- Interpretive signs – a few years ago we asked HMWT if they were willing to help with the signs, however, they were unable to do so. Therefore FOCF funded the signs and created the majority of the material. You will find QR codes on each of the signs which point to further material on our website.
- The new larger signs have been created and funded by the council.
- Wetlands volunteer group – there has been a wider callout for volunteers and a number have come from non-members. Thanks go to Stewart Weir for running the group

- Litter Picks – these have been going well thanks go to Robert, Melanie and Rachel for helping to run them.
- Electric scooters – Stephen and Peter were concerned when attending a meeting about the possible trial of scooters at the park and indicated that we did not think they were appropriate for the park. We also went to a second meeting on the topic and in general the feeling from those meetings is that it will not actually happen any time soon.
- Park Rangers – as ever, we are disappointed that there is only one ranger who covers the whole of Watford. Last year there was a plan for a summer ranger however, they did not turn up in the end. We hope to get a summer ranger this summer to support the one permanent ranger.
- Bird feeders/Park life – thanks go to Alec for doing the work. He also creates Park life with the help of many contributors and our thanks everyone for the work undertaken.

Apologies

Kevin Blake, Jenny Roberts, Alison Saunders, Amanda Marie-Newman, Graham Jones, John Houston, Martin Holden, Ruth Jinadasa, Anne Morris,

Approval of Minutes of AGM held on 15h May 2024 and matters arising

Motion to approve minutes from Robert Barnes and seconded by Steve Jakeman. No objections or other matters were raised and so the minutes were approved.

Treasurer's Report

Simonie Jeffree outlined this year's report.

Income.

Subscriptions continue to be steady with £1,167.00 received this year. Donations make up over 50% additional income with £1,460.11 received so thanks to the members who kindly round up their payments to Friends of Cassiobury Park.

Watford Lottery this year has given us £705.50 with an average of £60.50 per month. If you've not yet bought a Watford lottery ticket please consider doing so.

2 Gift Aid payments were received this financial year. Payment for 2022-23 was £454.14 and payment for 2023-24 was £1058.75 so making a total of £1512.89.

We received 2 grants this year: Veolia £965.00 which will be used to buy new equipment for volunteers and Asda foundation awarded us £2,200 which will be used to help purchase picnic tables that are wheelchair friendly.

Also big shout out to Tim Pettigrew who raised £282.65 from the sale of his unique wooden bowls at last year's AGM, with another 3 during the year, so totalling £393.65. Many thanks Tim.

Total income was £8,121.01 even higher than last year, so a very good year. Thanks everyone.

Expenditure

This has been an exciting year in the park, with new signage which we were able to support using previous years grants. We've also shared some of the costs for new park benches, along with the new floor in the Bird hide.

Quite a bit of equipment has been bought including new waders for working in the Wetlands, saws, loppers, tougher gloves, boots and first aid kits. We also bought smaller litter pickers for youngsters, as a result of a few new families coming along to join us. Bird food costs were down at £193.50 compared to £258.50 the previous year.

Subscriptions for Council for the Protection of Rural England and Herts/ Middlesex Wildlife Trust were up at £136.00. Administration costs included the hire of St Lukes for the AGM last year, the SGM meeting, and the deposit for this year's AGM. We also had our portion of Insurance with Watford Borough Council to cover.

Summary

Income was £8,121.01 while our Expenditure was £8,349.58, but some of that was using grant money. We still have £3,063.57 ring fenced which will be used to provide new benches along Lime Walk.

Many thanks to Julian Groves who has audited and signed off this year's accounts which were circulated prior to this meeting.

There was a question on expenditure that is marked as donations and for the volunteer support . Donation was the expenditure from funding which was for the signs, the volunteer support was for a first aid training course.

Tim Pettigrew proposed and Stewart Weir seconded to accept the accounts; and this was supported by all members present.

Membership Report

Robert Barnes gave an update:

We are currently at 357 named members this is up from 349 at the end of 2024, this is despite people leaving due to normal life changes and the removal of a number of long term non-payers. If we had names for all 2nd family members , something that is improving over time, we would be at 406 members which is a robust number compared to previous years.

We see increasingly people joining through the increased visibility of the charity through the website, social media and volunteering events. In addition we have seen a number of people join through the various posters and banners that we now have in the park.

We have now acquired this table cloth, and a feather flag to promote the charity better at events. One of the challenges for running membership stalls is the amount of effort it takes to set them up and staff them. We plan to trial "pop up" style stalls using the open doorway to the training area and the flag, notice boards, and table cloth to make us more visible while keeping the setup effort being much lower. This should allow us to target better weather days that have higher foot fall at shorter notice. We will continue to look for opportunities to run more traditional stalls, we are booked to be at the great big green week event in the High St, on June 8th and are also looking at options for the Pride event.

Volunteering continues to be a way to bring new people to the charity although not all progress to members. Of my conservation mailing list around 40% are non members. Volunteering numbers are up in general.

Totals for 2025 so far are for 329 hours of volunteering, with 170 hours of litter picking, and 72 hours HMWT lead conservation in the reserve and 87 hours for the wetlands. The wetlands have brought in a significant number of new volunteers. My thanks to Stewart Weir and Alex Popple who have worked so hard to make that a possibility.

Election of Committee and Officers

The Chair thanked the committee for all their work over the year and outlined their work along with others.

- Robert Barnes - Membership, Secretary and Volunteer lead.
- Simonie Jeffree - Is our Treasurer
- Steve Jakeman - the council liaison and dog walker i.e “Intelligence officer”
- Rachel Burke - runs our social media and support the litter picks, membership recruitment, etc
- Alec Thomas - Is the editor of Park Life and with the help of regular contributors such as Peter Fewell and Libby Gower produces an excellent magazine. He also fills the bird feeders, which is not simple given the need to wade through mud to do so.
- Kevin Blake - is our “IT guy” and manages our website and email systems. Work commitments did not allow him to attend today and he sends his apologies.
- The Chair thanked Anna Brooks for her time on the committee where she managed social media before leaving. She was presented a mug as a small recognition of her work.
- Thanks go to Isabel and Vicky who manage the park. They do a fantastic job!
- Sandy and Alex from Community Connections do a great job of looking after the park and wetland.
- Veolia do a good job at keeping the park clean and are very supportive of us and the park.
- Thanks to our volunteers for all their work and thanks again to Stewart for taking on the team lead role in the wetlands.
- Thanks to Cedar Cafe for providing free drinks to litter pickers.
- Thanks to Tim Pettigrew who creates wonderful bowls and donates the proceeds to FoCP
- Finally thanks to Julian Grove for auditing our accounts.

The Chair outlined that the existing committee plus two new nominations, Alistair and Wendy Crowder are willing to stand for the committee. It was proposed that they all be elected as committee members by Melanie Barnes and seconded by Alan Betts. A vote by show of hands was unanimous and no objections were raised and so the new committee was elected.

In addition, Steve Jakeman is willing to stand as the Chair of the committee. It was proposed by Libby Gower and seconded by Laurie Elvin that he be given the position. A vote by show of hands was unanimous and no objections were raised and so Steve was elected as the new Chair.

Presentation to Peter Jenkins

Robert Barnes lead the committee and members in thanks to Peter for his time on the committee and as Chair.

Peter took on the role 7 years ago and at the start took on many of the roles himself. Over time he has grown the committee, created the initial constitution and also overseen the new constitution. Beyond his administrative successes, it was recognised that probably one of his greatest achievements was to finally get the new Wetlands built. He started right at the beginning of the process and has supported the many often arduous reports and consultation phases. He also created much of the content for the signs. It is a major achievement and we all thanked him for his efforts. After a well justified round of applause from the membership, Peter was presented with a set of 3 bowls carved by Tim Pettigrew, formed from Ash that was felled in the woods as part of the Ash clearance. Peter will still remain a significant supporter of the work of FoCP and it is hoped that he will continue to support the management of the tools and the reserves, and contributions to park life, etc.

Council Update

Park Manager Isabel Crozier gave an update:

- Wetlands – it's been a very challenging time with the second highest wettest year on record and continuous rain over spring. Ponds have been forming all over the area and in the park due to high ground water. River levels continue to be very high. To get access to the wetlands we still need to use waders, however, the wetlands and all of the water have clearly been a benefit to the wildlife. Our plan is to improve the sluices so that it will make the path possible, assuming we can redirect the water. It will be possible to open the path to the viewing platform. The environmental agency require us not to use any hard landscaping materials so we are looking for options.
- We now have lovely new totem pole signs that have been put in place.
- The green loop cycle way is operational and new display boards are in place that show the route which is 6.7 miles long.
- There was a significant level of public tree planting where the Ash trees had been taken down due to Ash Dieback, the area will grow back with Ash saplings but they will die very quickly as they are susceptible to Ash Dieback, as a result 3000 young saplings of native trees, with deer safe covers, have been planted. There will be a need to do some maintenance, such as weeding, but until they grow it will be a great area for butterflies and other insects.
- Following a health and safety survey of the trees there has been, and will be further, tree surgery undertaken. Some of the ancient trees need to be fenced with fencing similar to that of the cypress "lion King" tree. The fencing will help the trees due to reducing the compaction of the area and allow wildlife to flourish, that will attract predators of insects that are detrimental to the trees.
- The paddling pools are going well, they will be closed between Easter and half term. There is some selective opening when the weather is nice, and so it will be opened this weekend and then again for half term, and then they will then remain open until September.
- The pools need a new tank due to leaks that have appeared in the current one. the cost of replacing the underground tank is prohibitive and so an overground tank will be put in place sometime around September or October in the area by the toilets.
- There has been some challenging antisocial behaviour in the park which was increased due to the High Street lockdown. The Police were however, very quick to increase patrols in the area. They have asked us to improve the sight lines in the park as areas of vegetation that hide areas of the park that the antisocial behaviour can take place in. As a result there will be further vegetation management within the park to improve the sight lines
- We have a new seasonal range who is called Tom and he will be working shifts between 11 and 8 pm.
- Volunteering in the park has increased, thanks in part to FoCP and the wetlands. A number of corporate groups have been coming into the park and supporting areas such as the green gym and then interfaith area, the council have approached local businesses to help with funding in some of these areas and as a result, new trees have been planted. Vicky is also working with some special need groups to water the trees and to do some litter picking in the park.
- During the Great Big Green Week there will be a council volunteer session on the 13th of June.
- If people are unable to do letter picking on the regular Saturday session, there is the option to drop in to the hub to register, and then you can collect a stick and some bags and litter pick on the days that you visit
- Events
 - Fun fair which will be starting shortly on the 24th during half term

- Race for life on the 7th of June
- Color scape in August,
- Pride
- Taste of the Caribbean
- Oktoberfest,
- Bandstand music will be started again on Sundays
- HMWT will be running a dawn chorus walk on the 29th of May which is at 5 am, On the 19th of June there will be a nature walk
- Butterfly walk on the 29th of June

Questions:

Q. I tried the QR code on the totem pole signs and expected to get a map, but instead you go to a generic page with information.

A. Isabel said she would investigate and see if it can be improved, at least with a link to a map perhaps.

Q. Can we do more recycling at the litter picks.

A. Robert Barnes and Isabel to discuss options on how we might do this, what can be collected and where the material can be left once separated.

Q. Will there be a Wildfest this year?

A. No.

Q. Is the person who created the FoCP logo credited anywhere.

A. Yes, to some extent . Robert to investigate if we can add something to the website.

AOB

There was no other business and the formal meeting was then closed with thanks from the Chair.

After the meeting drinks and “nibbles” were served and a social event was held .

Appendix - 2025 Accounts

Friends of Cassiobury Park Balance as of 05/04/2025

Income and Expenditure Accounts

Expenditure

	24-25	23-24	22-23
Post, Stationery & Printing	0.00	1,074.01	12.24
Donations	3,660.04	55.00	0.00
Subscriptions	136.00	76.00	76.00
Meetings & Venues	744.72	1,726.50	269.00
Stock Purchase	738.23	567.11	339.48
IT	0.00	0.00	94.44
Volunteer Support	108.00	0.00	0.00
Insurance & Miscellaneous	4.25	331.36	56.00
PayPal & SumUp Commission	36.91	60.69	28.52

Sub-total less Grant Expenditure

	5,428.15	3,890.67	875.68
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Expenditure against all open Grants

	2,921.43	0.00	0.00
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Expenditure Total

	8,349.58	3,890.67	875.68
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Excess (Inc-Exp) excl. grant

	-472.14	3,349.79	2,010.07
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Excess (Inc-Exp) incl. grants received F.Y. 2024/25

	-228.57	3,349.79	3,830.07
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Funds

	24-25	23-24	22-23
Balance b/f	23,829.80	20,480.01	16,649.94
Excess (Inc - Exp)	-228.57	3,349.79	3,830.07
Balance c/f	23,601.23	23,829.80	20,480.01

Accounts prepared by Treasurer: Mrs Simonie Jeffree

Audited by : Mr Julian Groves

Simonie Jeffree 30/4/25

Julian Groves 30/4/25

Income

	24-25	23-24	22-23
Subscriptions	1,167.00	1,357.98	1,349.00
Donations	1,460.11	3,375.00	1,028.00
Sale of Stock	0.00	0.00	0.00
Interest	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gift Aid	1,512.89	0.00	430.75
Other	816.00	2,507.48	78.00

Sub-total less Grants

	4,956.01	7,240.46	2,885.75
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Grants Received

	3,165.00	0.00	1,820.00
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Income Total

	8,121.01	7,240.46	4,705.75
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	24-25	23-24	22-23
Cash	127.69	74.19	360.69
Bank	22,553.20	22,337.69	20,119.32
PayPal	920.34	1,417.92	0.00

	23,601.23	23,829.80	20,480.01
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Ring Fenced for Open Grants

	3,063.57	2,820.00	2,820.00
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