

Friends of Preston Park AGM 14th November, 11.00, by Zoom

Participants: Carol Cole (CC), Clive Shepherd (CS), Kerry Pickett (KP), Rose Jones (RJ), Andy Jeavons (AJ), Beatrice Moreau-Gray (BMG), Alan Griffiths (AG)(Operations Manager for B&H City Parks), Paul Campbell (PC) (Head of Strategy for B&H City Parks), Siriol Hugh-Jones (SHJ) (Councillor for Preston Park Ward), Leo Littman (LL) (Councillor for Preston Park Ward), Amy Healey (AH) (Councillor for Preston Park Ward), plus 15 members of the general public

Apologies: Dimitri Mehandziski, Joe McNulty, Mike McGuinness

1) Introduction

The Friends of Preston Park Chair, CC welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the three Preston Park Ward councillors, Siriol Hugh-Jones, Leo Littman and Amy Healey. She thanked the Friends of Preston Park Committee for all its hard work throughout the year and welcomed the addition of Mike McGuinness and Beatrice Moreau-Gray as new members.

2) Chairman's Annual Report

The Chairman's report can be found separately on the Friends of Preston Park website.

3) Committee Election

Committee members were asked to introduce themselves and CC asked the members of the public if they wished to re-elect the current Committee. The Committee was proposed by Lin MacCallum Stewart, seconded by Anne-Fay Townsend and re-elected in full.

4) Garden Manager's Overview

AJ gave an overview of the gardens in Preston Park. The current lockdown regulations state that only one volunteer can work per day under supervision so the three regular volunteer garden groups have had to be stood down. The rose garden will be mulched soon and pruning will also start. Plants which will be paid for by Friends of Preston Park through a Pride social impact award, will arrive in spring for the front beds and Dahlia Walk. It is hoped that once the volunteers are able to fully return that the plants will all be planted by April. The previous order for 30 roses had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. The climbing roses have now been reordered. An expert on ponds has been commissioned to give advice regarding the renovation of the Rotunda pond.

5) Treasurer's report

The annual report can be found on the Friends of Preston Park website.

6) Questions & Answers with Councillors and Council Officials

Q1. Linda Baguley asked if Pride could be moved to another site as noise and general upheaval for two weeks is an issue.

A. SHJ responded that the issue is where else could Pride go? Preston Park is the largest park in Brighton & Hove and areas such as Stanmer Park are too far away and difficult for so many thousands of people to get to. LL further added that although there are protections on the park as to the number of events held as well as to how many days can be given over to events, the council is unable to provide anywhere else suitable and that Preston Park remains the best place for the Pride event that brings in a lot of revenue to the city. Hollingbury golf course was also suggested as a venue, but LL pointed out that the golf course is also leased out by the council and that the tenant's lease agreement doesn't state that they should host events for the council.

Q2. Sandra Staufer and KP asked what are the plans for traffic in the park? There seems to be too many cars in the park. Why can't it be car free?

A. SHJ responded that as of 23rd November, 2020, new traffic tariffs are to be implemented that might make people reconsider parking at Preston Park. There is enforcement of the charges and so far 807 parking charge notices have been served this year. SHJ noted that there does seem to be an issue when parking is free. However, she stated that if people see a vehicle parked where it shouldn't be they should call the hotline: (03456 035469 and select option 2) and that an officer should attend within the hour. 'No entry' signs have been painted on the road at the top of Lime Tree Walk. AG further added that bollards will be added to narrow the road at the top and deter people from parking under the trees near the velodrome. It is planned that the highways contractor will complete this work before Christmas.

Q3. CC asked about the use of public order notices that prevented people staying overnight in the park and enabled the police to remove people within 24 hours. Why hasn't the use of these notices been renewed and who is responsible?

A. LL offered some background history: in 2017, the council introduced Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs). However, such orders did not work the way the government intended as some councils that had already started using PSPOs, used them to clear the streets of homeless people. This raised ethical questions about fining people who are homeless. In 2017, the government determined that councils could not use PSPOs to clear homeless people. Brighton & Hove City Council ran the policy for two years after which it assessed the effectiveness of the PSPOs and concluded that they didn't work as a deterrent. Having resorted to court orders that are too laborious, a new way forward is currently being assessed; a Part 55 Order

that will hopefully speed up the process of evicting overnight dwellers. SHJ further added that encampments are monitored throughout the city and that if rough sleepers are spotted, the public should contact Streetlink to help.

Q4. CC, Danica Bulgin and Keely Kane asked why no one appears to be managing the park anymore in terms of social behaviour. We used to have rangers, but we no longer see them. Is there a strategic plan to tackle anti-social behaviour in Preston Park? Can we have more visible policing?

A. AH responded that Public Space Community Officers (PSCOs) are tasked to patrol the park, but that they only work until 10pm. If people are behaving criminally or anti-socially, the public should call either 999 or 101. A Local Action Team (LAT) is currently being set up to try and rectify the issue of anti-social behaviour, and lighting in the sports area is under discussion. AG noted that there is a ranger, but as he covers such a large area we might not see him very often. It was asked if signage might improve behaviour, but PC suggested that signs are limited in what they achieve and that further enforcement was needed. He further stated that the council are in the process of evolving a strategy that will get the best out of enforcement. This will be achieved with looking at how the council environment enforcement officers work, how their field officers work and with the aim of improving liaison with the police. PC also commented that he would be happy to promote a topical campaign using signage that would help create an impact. This fits with the Friends of Preston Park plan to create a strategy to tackle anti-social behaviour in Preston Park for the new year.

Q5. Marguerite Wright asked that since the walled garden next to Preston Manor has been taken over by the Museums Trust it would seem that the volunteers that have worked there for 24 years are no longer allowed to help. At the same time the garden manager who worked for City Parks retired. The garden is dying and she wants to know how we can save the garden before it is too late? Why can't the volunteers continue?

A. AG responded that since the walled garden became part of the Museums Trust, City Parks were no longer obligated to replace the retiring garden manager. It is now up to the Trust to decide what happens in the garden as it is no longer part of the structure of Preston Park. SHJ pointed out that the reason the Museums Trust was formed was to create an entity separate from the council so that they could apply for extra funding. She believes it could be that due to Covid-19 the reorganisation of power which was meant to happen on 1st April, 2020, didn't happen until 1st October, 2020. This might be the reason that the garden hasn't been dealt with. SHJ offered to liaise with Marguerite Wright and the Museums Trust. It also was suggested that a representative from the Museums Trust should be invited to join the Friends of Preston Park Committee.

Q6. Peta Pickett asked that with so many elm trees being lost in Preston Park to Dutch Elm Disease, will these trees be replaced as well as those on the streets of Brighton & Hove? CC also asked about the 50 bequeathed Dutch Elm resistant trees.

A. AH agreed that the council would indeed want to replace the elms in the park, but as this has been the worst year on record for Dutch Elm Disease in Brighton, it may take some time to do. Currently, the emphasis is on Ash Dieback. AH also said a campaign has been started to inform people about these tree diseases. Signs have been put up and the council has contacted Network Rail to ensure that they are also assessing their elms. She reiterated the importance of log sellers to make sure that they do not sell elm logs for burning in the area. A new tree planting officer has been appointed and will start soon. With regard to street trees, the cost (£5,000) is hindering replacement, but it is hoped that trees will eventually be replaced. AG commented that a number of trees are ready to be planted in the park, but he couldn't provide details regarding the Dutch Elm resistant trees. It is hoped that the arrival of the new officer will sort this out.

Q7. Reba McDowall asked why can't Preston Park have larger rubbish bins and BBQ bins as they do on the seafront? CC asked why BBQs are allowed in Preston Park?

A. AH noted that rubbish has become a huge issue since lockdown. Whilst it is realised that we need new or larger bins, the issue is how these bins are emptied. The council is to start a pilot scheme to trial recycling bins and this will help to assess what might be done in the parks in general. A consultation is underway to consider banning BBQs in the parks areas.

Q8. Lin MacCallum Stewart asked why isn't it possible to leave areas within Preston Park a bit wilder?

A. AG responded that whilst areas have been left wild to create more biodiversity, City Parks still needs to cut the areas at least once a year. However he did concede that more felled trees could be left to rot to encourage insects, etc. and create a wilder feel in places.

Q9. CC asked why the wildflower meadow hasn't been maintained. Will it be restored?

A. AG agreed that the meadow is looking messy. He suggested that the pandemic was to blame for lack of action and agreed that it will be back at some stage next year although it may be in the form of island beds. LL agreed that it is important to get the meadow back as it is very popular.

Q10. Jilly Welch asked about the worn grass and the amount of paths being created within the park environment, particularly under the trees and the impact on the roots. Is there a way to manage this issue?

- A. AG agreed that certain areas have become muddy. He suggested a path in the near future for the area near the ex-bowls pavilion and to temporarily fence off areas for re-seeding so that the grass has time to regrow.

Q11. Daniel Travis asked the councillors their views on whether they supported a proposal for the tennis courts to be taken on as a privately run initiative?

- A. LL responded that whilst the three councillors support a community led takeover it will be up to the Council Sports & Activity Committee to make that decision. DT responded that his proposal should be signed with the community interest company that he will be heading and that a report will be with the council soon for review. It is envisaged that it should be approved by January, 2021. DT hopes that the facilities will cater for up to 500 children. He aims to put in LED lighting to combat the issues of anti-social behaviour around the courts.

Q12. CS asked the councillors to express their vision for Preston Park; if they could make one investment what would it be?

- A. AH said she would like more trees, biodiversity and fewer cars. SHJ wants more space for more wildflowers. She would like to ban cars from the park altogether (except disabled drivers). LL would like to see more fruit trees. He also added his concern for the growing pathways in the park. CS agreed and hoped that the Friends of Preston Park consider how we might make these suggestions a reality.

CC thanked everyone for their attendance and active inclusion in the debate and suggested that we should have more of this kind of public interactive debate in the future.

The meeting ended at 12.30.