

Minutes of the Montagu Square Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2020

Held on Monday 2nd March 2020 at Wetherby Preparatory School at 6.30pm.

Attendees

Peter Blott (Acting Chair), Anne Bristow, Sue Smith, Julio Castro, Chris Morris.

Mary Hicks, John Hicks, Anne Matthew Campbell, Judy Sanderson, Robert Bramwell-Jones, Julia Strauss, Sarah Lang, David Lane, Sara Lane, Teresa Kearney (Portman Estate).

Salvatore Giorgio (Westbourne Block Management), Adolfo Harrison.

1) To consider and approve the Minutes of the last AGM held on Monday 25th February 2019

Peter Blott apologised that the minutes from the previous AGM meeting had not been circulated. These will be sent to attendees in the next days and will be formally considered for approval at next year's AGM.

2) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3) To receive the Annual Report of the Committee

Peter Blott noted that cost of tree management in the garden has become a recurring significant expense each year. The garden rate was increased in 2019 to cover the specific cost of removing the diseased London plane tree in the north east corner of the garden, but we will have a very similar level of expense on our tree management programme in 2020 and future years. This year £12,000 has been budgeted to cover the fix cost of treating and managing the trees. The north east corner has been replanted with flowering shrubs and a new tree will be chosen to replace the one taken down.

A few questions were asked mostly regarding the hedges and bushes around the railings, noting that they are not tall enough to provide sufficient privacy in the garden. It was recalled how, back in the eighties, they used to be much higher. Higher bushes could also work as a deterrent if someone tried to climb over the railings. The general feeling was that we should endeavour to use plantings to create a more private feeling within the garden. The Committee welcomed and noted the comments and Peter Blott invited attendees to get involved in the design and reshaping of the Garden. Anne Bristow pointed out that the tree cover in the square means there is insufficient sunshine in the garden for many species, but that all new planting includes species that thrive in the shade. She also invited trustees to use the Garden website to leave their feedback.

The Committee thanked Sue Smith for taking over the care of the birds and wildlife in the Garden.

David Lane and John Hicks raised concern about the delivery of the AGM notifications. It was felt that some people had not received them. Peter Blott accepted that there had been a number of problems with the distribution list used to send out the notices. In particular, this year the Portman Estate had not provided contact information on their tenants citing data privacy concerns. It is believed that some of their tenants did not receive the notifications. Peter Blott and Westbourne Block Management are working with Teresa Kearney of the Portman Estate to make sure future notices are correctly directed to all residents on the square.

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4) Presentation and discussion on Children's Play Area refurbishment

Anne Bristow introduced the project. She pointed out that the existing play equipment and surrounding area is aging and there a number of significant expenses that must be done to maintain health and safety compliance and replace worn out play equipment at the end of its life. This could potentially cost £53,000. This means it would be an appropriate time to upgrade the whole area, not only for the children, but also for all residents.

She showed pictures of the area around the south entrance, including the low brick wall around the building that houses UK Power Network's substation, which highlighted some of the poor conditions. This area looks unsightly and also has health and safety implications.

Adolfo Harrison, landscape architect, presented the project. He outlined the proposed design showing how it would maximise the space around the substation to create an inviting communal area meant to be inclusive; a space where games don't dictate but integrate.

The project design includes removing the low walls and building a pergola structure starting from the main entrance and then developing around the substation building and beyond up to the edge of the current play area. The idea would be to integrate the substation building in the design, make it the focal point and create seating areas around it. Vegetation would line the footpath by the main entrance inviting people to gather together also creating a little buffer between the entrance and the substation. The pergola would be covered by climbers to form a cosy and private environment and provide the framework for a number of individual pieces of play equipment.

The project was well received with a number of questions discussed including: the area of proposed paving, the species that would be planted and their robustness to withstand children's play, the challenge of creating a buffer to the street that creates a sense of privacy inside and consultation with Joseph Jones (the gardener).

Anne Bristow pointed out that it is an ambitious and costly project but it would reshape the garden in a positive way and would leave a legacy for future generations. She also mentioned the challenge in fundraising and donations to cover the cost of the project.

Peter Blott said it's still an early stage to analyse all the details and there is nothing to be agreed at the moment. A number of challenges must be addressed before the project design is finalised, notably around costings, interaction with UK Power Network, Westminster Council planning and fundraising. Once again he asked residents to get more involved and feel free to give their feedback for the realisation of the project.

5) To consider and if thought fit to accept the accounts of the Trust for the year ended 31st December 2019

Peter Blott outlined the accounts, highlighting the increased garden rate levy in 2019 and the areas of increased spending over previous years. There was some discussion addressing questions concerning hanging basket funds, utility costs and garden rate late payers.

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Voluntary donations of £2,339 were received in 2019 for the maintenance of the hanging baskets. These are segregated in the accounts. In 2019 there were no expenses related to hanging baskets because these costs were met by the Montagu Square Residents Association, which has now been wound up.

The accounts were approved.

6) To levy the Garden rate for the year to 31st December 2020

The Garden levy was increased by 3% in line with inflation - a rate of 1.0120 pence in the pound on the annual values taken as 8% of the 2005 building insurance values.

The levy was approved.

7) To elect the Committee for the year to 31st December 2020

The Committee was re-elected.

8) Open Forum

The Trustees will send David Cruise, who has left the Garden Committee after being chairman for 12 years, a letter to thank him for all the hard work during those years of involvement with the Garden.

9) Any other business

The Residents thanked the Committee as well as the gardeners for their continued hard work and dedication to the Square.

The meeting closed at 8:30pm, with thanks to Wetherby Preparatory School for hosting.