

Minutes of the AGM of Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park, held in RBC Council Chamber on July 3rd 2025

Introduction

The aims of the meeting were explained: to introduce the committee; to recount the successes and improvements in the events and activities in the park since the last AGM, and to take a look at and answer questions, if any, in reference to the Management Plan.

Firstly, introductions were made:

Sue Runciman, Chair; Lynne Lambert, Communications Secretary; Stella Claridge, Financial Secretary.

A guest in attendance who had been specifically invited was Steve Bailey, who leads the work parties and the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. Other invited council representatives were not able to attend. Apologies were given by Heather Lewis and Andy Ford.

Other persons present were as follows –

Peter Lambert, Gerard Runciman, Sue Miller, Jacquie and John Baker, Angela Dean, and Ronda and David Newberry: 12 people altogether.

Constitution

No changes to the constitution were thought necessary this year (however, later in the meeting the subject of the management of social media was raised by Steve Bailey and considered; this may need to be addressed as part of the constitution. SR will contact others with historical admin responsibility regarding this as well as the 'double FB page' conundrum).

All members present agreed informally that they are happy for the FQEP Committee to continue as it is, although no voting was necessary this year. The next voting will need to take place in 2027, unless any of the present committee resigns in the meantime.

FQEP Annual Report*

SR went through the headlines of the annual report, which can be found on the website. Points to note were as follows:

- **Increased membership (up to 150 from 144, and FB followers up to 861);**
- **Regular events continue to run smoothly, as follows:**
 - the work parties, led by Steve Bailey, for which he was thanked profusely;
 - the monthly amble, followed by a social gathering at the Thatched Cottage public house, (also some members continue to attend the Quiz Night there once a month);
 - family events, which have become an important part of the calendar year for many local families – most notably the Easter and Christmas Trails.
- **Significant additions to the park**
 - Noticeboards, information boards, 5 new benches, 5 replaced benches and 2 repainted children's seats by the pond; a new shed, and fifty new whips in the place of removed invasive rhododendrons.
 - Jeremy and Conrad, local residents, were thanked profusely for their help in building the new shed, and for their support in allowing us to keep a shed in their garden for the last four years, as well as their support for the work parties.
- **Maintenance Update**
 - The report includes a maintenance update that is concerned exclusively with the pond. Full details are to be found there, but briefly: the pond is to be cleared, and debris and silt moved into the part of it beyond the island. The rest will be dug to a depth that is yet to be finalised but which will depend upon what is found when the digging commences. The exercise is an ecological one, and as such will prioritise habitats of wildlife.
- **Financial Report: Stella Claridge**
 - Stella explained that the report runs up to May 31st as this represents a full year from the last report at last year's AGM.
 - Income = £258.01. Expenditure = £655.23. The balance as of 31 May 2025 is £954.93.
 - Main income – donations from events and Rushmoor Lottery. Main expenditure – shed and materials and prizes for events.

Management Plan 2023 – 2028 – Steve Bailey

Details of the recent maintenance update can be found in the full report of the year, and is concerned exclusively with the pond. Steve Bailey was invited to comment on the Management Plan as a whole, including this aspect of it.

In response Steve said that he considered the most important role of the Management Plan to be concerning access, and in particular safety. He remarked that a main focus must always be the trees – specifically, falling branches, and that ironically however much we keep an eye out for trees that may have been damaged by fungus, it is often the case that the tree releases a healthy branch for lack of efficiency: beeches under stress will shed a branch while looking very healthy, and healthy trees will blow over, especially in dry weather, which is a problem. Lynne Lambert mentioned that the remaining stump of the felled tree by the FR car park still has fruiting bodies in it that will continue to produce spores, and Steve replied that they are always in the environment, but that it is often the trees that you don't expect to fail, that do.

He added that the Management Plan is largely concerned with the fact that the park is a broadleaf woodland which has some veteran trees, and an Esso pipeline which also needs to be protected – whether we like it or not, it is there and needs to be managed safely.

The rhododendrons, overall, damage the enjoyment of the site. The clearance of these has largely improved this – the site feels safer, there are wider spaces to enjoy. The historic tunnels of rhododendrons, enjoyed by Empress Eugenie and Queen Victoria, will be left.

Going forward, there is at present no contractor this year. The one who was responsible for mulching has now retired. Much of this work has therefore fallen to the volunteers.

The veteran trees can be protected by haloing, for example around The Fairy Tree. Lynne Lambert mentioned the willow that is also a veteran, and the need to earmark potential future veterans. Steve agreed, and said that any decent-sized deciduous tree can be considered a veteran. The biggest ones we have are already on the ancient trees website.

Regarding the pond, we questioned the figure of 50 cms for the depth as quoted by Heather Lewis in her plan for the pond following a recent reconnoitre, as this figure had not been mentioned at the time. Steve was unable to explain this figure either, so we await answers. However, Heather was very clear that the work on the pond is essentially an ecological exercise and not a flood prevention one. And Steve pointed out that area is more important than depth in the consideration of storm water.

Other priorities this year have been to establish a thriving understorey, and it does not at present seem to be surviving very well. It is likely that the rhododendrons have left toxins in the soil that make it difficult for other plants to succeed – but we will keep on trying. The native bluebells have not been doing very well, but some other species have started to thrive. A grant bid was given in on 17th July and is likely to be successful

Steve was thanked for his verbal report and for all he does to lead the work in the park, and the official AGM meeting was closed.

Following the meeting there was a presentation by Sue Runciman:

Jane Austen and the Importance of the Hampshire Countryside in the Great Novels.

Jane Austen was born and raised in Hampshire, and 2025 is her 250th birthday. For this reason we decided it would be appropriate to add this as this year's presentation.

The Date of the Next Meeting

is to be confirmed; it will be in June.

Sue Runciman,

Chair

FQEP, July 14th 2025

***Please note that the full FQEP Annual Report can be sent to you on request if you wish to have further details.**