

Annual General Meeting 2023 – Monday 30 October - Draft Minutes

Chair: Stewart Williams (SW)

Secretary: Fiona Machen Harrison (FMH)

Treasurer: Virginia Williams (VW)

16 members attending, 3 by proxy, 3 invited speakers.

6.45-7pm – pre-drinks

SW introduced himself as the new Chair for the Friends of Mycenae Gardens. He welcomed those attending and especially new members. Membership was up from 87 members to 94 across the year with 3 additional new members signing up at the meeting.

1) Approval of 2022 AGM draft Minutes

Approved unanimously following a member's question about the level of engagement in the maintenance of the gardens by the children and staff of Greenwich Waldorf School. Rita Sesay (RS), committee and school staff member, answered the question stating various initiatives across the years. These included rebuilding the fence on the eastern side during the school's annual Work Week, helping build willow fences around some of the shrub beds, creating wooden signs for the wildlife area behind the dead hedging on the western side. RS also stated that the importance of fostering a positive human relationship with the natural world was embedded in the Waldorf ethos and curriculum.

2) Chair's report

SW thanked out-going chair, Mark Barnes (MB), for leading and promoting the group for many years. MB was presented with gifts of thanks from the committee. MB thanked the new committee members for their efforts in taking the gardens forward in the future. In his Chair's report, SW talked about the Friends initiatives and activities in the last year. For the full report, see *Appendix 1*

3) Treasurer's report – Current balance of funds £428.33. see *Appendix 2*

4) (Re) election of committee members

SW advised that 3 current committee members (Mark Barnes, Fiona Machen Harrison and Vera Shuvaeva-Becar) would be stepping down by rotation but were prepared to stand again. No objections from members to their re-standing. No further members wished to stand for the committee. All three were re-elected without dissent.

5) Greener Greenwich Community Network (GGCN)

Guest speakers, Tamasin Rhymes and Helen Merati, shared details of a new borough-wide climate action network. TR explained how the network came into being: set up following the Royal Borough of Greenwich council's suggested Climate Champions working group not materialising after several years. HM explained that the group aims to support the council to achieve its Carbon Neutral Plan goals by 2030.

TR explained that the group contains members representing various voluntary groups such as park friends, community and campaign groups, residents' associations and individuals. Under the GGCN umbrella, there are smaller sub-groups working on specific parts of the council's 7-category plan,

eg: Natural Environment group working to rid the borough's streets of chemical weed killer spraying. By harnessing collective knowledge, GGCN aims to effectively engage decision makers and experts to make a positive difference to the borough's climate outcomes.

TR and HM shared graphics of GGCN's aims and an email address to get in touch, sign up for updates on meetings, local events, and climate news. These can be found in *Appendix 3*.

- 6) VW – Photo Competition/Calendars/Cards – an invite to buy our new FoMG Christmas cards, news of an upcoming photo competition and a 2025 calendar. Please see *Appendix 2* for more details.

- 7) Joe Beale – presentation on his Wildlife Survey of Mycenae Gardens & The Dell
Joe shared an engaging presentation of his findings and methodology for the wildlife survey he carried out for the Friends of Mycenae Gardens in Spring 2023. He shared some (very accomplished!) photos of butterflies, moths and flies as well as listing the birds and evidence of other species on site. He also ran through some of his recommendations for improving the gardens' habitats for wildlife. Joe's full survey report can be found to download from the Friends of Mycenae Gardens website [here](#).
The Friends thanked Joe for his talk and his work supporting local knowledge of the wildlife in the gardens. Joe was gifted a book from the Friends by way of appreciation.

- 8) FMH/AR – Plans for the Future
Committee members Fiona Machen Harrison and Anne Robbins shared the Friends group's plans for the future of the gardens including short term actions, council agreements and longer-term plans for funding and accreditation. An A3 map of the gardens was shown to members with planned actions explained. The map can be found, along with the details of the talk, in *Appendix 4*.

- 9) VW – Volunteering/donations
VW) asked for donations of time on our Action Days and money for the Friends group to carry out its work to restore and improve the gardens. A summary can be found in *Appendix 2*

- 10) Q&A
SW asked Joe Beale to give his expert view on how well the gardens' wildlife was doing compared to when previously surveyed. Joe explained that despite the heavy use, his observations had led him to think the gardens were holding onto the biodiversity seen previously. It was generally agreed that with improvements to wildlife habitats, we would all hope to see it improve.

Chairman's report

First, the committee wanted to thank the outgoing chair, Mark Barnes, for his years of service in the role. He is stepping away from the Chair but is willing to continue to act as a committee member. The committee hope that he will continue to do so, as his enthusiasm and knowledge are invaluable additions to the Friends.

We have been fairly busy over the last year, with the notable activities listed below.

Questionnaire

We conducted a survey to better understand the use we make of the park. This is still available via the website, and we encourage everyone that has not yet completed it to do so, as this is your chance to have a voice in the future of the gardens.

The broad findings highlight the differing needs of the groups of users of the park:

- School – for their recreation and exercise
- Dog walkers – enjoy the fact that it is a bounded space
- Pre and post school meetings – for parents and children
- Quiet space for reflection
- Mycenae house – for social events

We want to be as inclusive as possible, so we have been striving to find ways to accommodate the various, sometimes conflicting, needs of the different groups, but we do respect the right for all to be able to use the space with sufficient tolerance for all.

Nature Survey

We commissioned Joe Beale - a local Naturalist and Wildlife surveyor (and a whole lot more) - to complete a Bird and Butterfly survey and Joe will be presenting this shortly. We know you will find this interesting. Joe has made several recommendations and we have taken those, and feedback from the survey and in consultation with the school, Mycenae house and the council, have developed a plan to deliver it.

Sadly, this plan is taking some time to get moving. I fear the council are resource constrained in terms of time and money to help us right now. We therefore need all the help we can get to move the plan along. Incidentally, the FOMG is totally voluntary, and in fact we fund a lot of the activities ourselves. Virginia, Fiona and Anne will explain more about this later on.

Having said this, the survey that Joe undertook was funded by the local Ward and Greenwich parks, so a big thanks to them for this.

Action days

We held several action days with some very useful contributions from the school and the community and our friends from GoodGym too.

- Winter: this was very successful where we reinforced the dead hedging
- Spring: we further reinforced the dead hedging, trimmed some of the bushes, completed Willow weaving, and repaired the border fencing. A good day's effort with a nice turnout.
- We secured a truckload of wood chip that we managed to spread around some of the more needy areas. Another helpful crowd of adults and children helped there.
- The school also purchased and spread another truckload of wood chip too!

Other

We should also note that the park has suffered less damage than prior years. Hopefully, this is a trend that will continue as we look to enhance the park.

We now have a new Information board at the front of the park paid for by the Westcombe Society from their Ward Budget so thanks to them both for this.

We are also expecting another tree shortly. This is a kind donation from Cathy on behalf of her father Anthony Twist – a keen historian who has an interest in Mycenae house.

The future

I am hoping that during the next year we can develop a long-term strategy for the Gardens that will make it an even more enticing place to visit. Fiona and Anne will talk more about this and how we intend to deliver it.

Once again, the committee is trying to drive things along, but we do need your help and support to deliver a community green space.

Closing comments

Green spaces are the lungs of the city. They are also a place for many different people to use for many differing needs.

Councils are under increased budgetary pressure, so the community needs to work to support these green spaces.

As the committee, we are willing to carry the banner, but we need help from all areas of the community to make it succeed.

We will be unveiling our long-term strategy early in 2024 and we hope this will inspire the community to get behind us to deliver a wonderful place we can all enjoy.

Stewart Williams - Chair

Appendix 2- Treasurer's report

Finances

The balance in Oct 2022 was £272.15. Effective Closing balance £428.33 after removing committed funds, which was donated by the Westcombe society, for the notice board (thank you to them).

Income came from personal donations and the ParkFest bucket collection.

Expenditure in the year included website domain and the card reader for help with collecting funds.

We have opened a new bank account through Metrobank which doesn't charge for transactions.

It is good to see the account with more money but doesn't consider personal donations from the committee to fund the Action Days, therefore this would mean maintaining the gardens going forward would not be sustainable unless we get help from you.

I will talk about this later after Fiona and Anne have explained the plans but hopefully you have had a sneak preview of the cards on sale today.

The accounts are on the desk at the front if you want more detail

Photo comp/calendars/cards

As already mentioned, we have some Christmas cards on sale. There are 2 different photos of the gardens taken by a renowned local photographer (thanks Mark B) and printed by the local Trojan Press. We haven't added greeting words inside, so you could use them as a greeting card of any type. The cost is £5 for 5 cards and any profit goes straight to the FOMG. If you can't decide which design you like best you can always buy both! If you don't have cash, we do have a card reader and if you don't have either on you please contact the FOMG through email and we will deliver the cards to you. They will also be on sale in Mycenae House (thanks Mark JB of Mycenae House)

In addition, we are going to have a photo competition. More details will follow but essentially it will be a monthly competition where people will be encouraged to take photos of the gardens and the winners' photos will be included in a Mycenae Gardens calendar for 2025. Look out for further details on the website/emails and Westcombe News.

Volunteering/Donations

So, you have now heard our plans for the gardens, but to get to the position of getting the grants there will be a lot of time/effort and some funds needed and the committee cannot do this alone. So what we need from you is help and this is in two different ways:

TIME – If you can give us any time on our Action Days that will be fantastic, or on our call to arms if we ever receive the bark promised by the council.

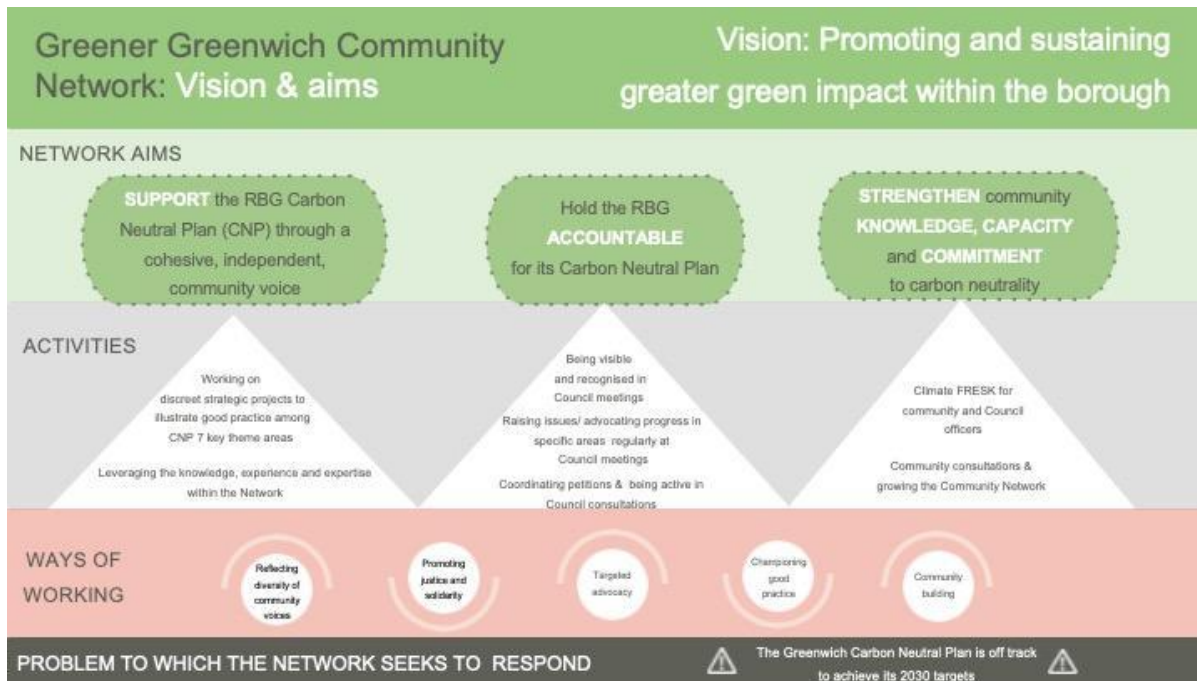
Money – We know that the cost-of-living crisis is making money tight for everyone (including the council), but if there is anything that you can donate so that we can all enjoy the improvements in the gardens it will be so appreciated.

It is a community garden so with your help it will become an even better one.

Please contact us and we can share bank details.

Virginia Williams - Treasurer

Appendix 3 – GGCN (guest speakers Tamasin Rhymes and Helen Merati)



Join our
mailing
list

ggcommunitynetwork@gmail.com

Appendix 4 - Plans for the Future – Fiona Machen Harrison & Anne Robbins

Immediate Changes

Following damage caused to the gardens during the pandemic and then by last year's drought, the new committee's most urgent focus has been to develop a restoration plan. This plan has been agreed by all the user groups along with the council. It has also been informed by Joe Beale's wildlife survey and recommendations, of course. The plan includes:

- building out and strengthening the dead hedge,
- enclosing the shrub beds,
- coppicing,
- taking out some trees (non-native, invasive, not very beneficial for wildlife)
- renewing a lawned area directly outside Mycenae House,
- creating a spring-flowering wildflower meadow in front of Woodlands,
- developing a new dead hedge in the North-East corner to allow flora and fauna to return and provide a wildlife corridor into the Dell.

As you can imagine, this will be a lot of work, and we're grateful that the Greenwich Parks and Open Spaces department has been responsive to our requests for changes and support.

Council Agreements

The Council officers and the district parks team have plans to:

- enclose the shrub beds with chestnut fencing in order of agreed priority. This work will begin immediately.
- supply and install stakes for the expansion of the wildlife area with new dead hedging in time for our Bulb Planting Day in December 2023 or our Winter Action Day in early March 2024. This will be done in sections each time the Friends Group holds an Action Day when prunings can be used to build out the hedging.
- coppicing a holly tree towards the northeast corner which will encourage more wildlife by opening the area to more sun.
- restore some of the lawn in March 2024 and introduce a wildflower meadow.
- Supply and install more stakes so we can enclose the north-east corner with dead-hedging in 2024.

Of course, there is a lot that volunteers can do, and we count on the Friends, parents at the school, and local volunteers including the Good Gym for help. Our upcoming **ACTION DAY (Saturday 11 November 10.30-13:00)** will draw on the community to plant the new whitebeam tree, kindly donated by Dr Twist, and to build up the dead hedging with some of the material we plan to saw down or prune out. Then in December, we will be having a bulb planting day, so look out for spring colour. Please come if you can!

Grants and Accreditations

In the longer term, the Friends group hopes to attract funding to help support actions such as

- decompaction underneath the plane trees,
- further wildlife surveys to monitor the effect of improvements,
- community engagement programmes and talks.

Alongside this funding, we hope to achieve some accreditations in the form of a Green Flag Community Award and perhaps even the coveted Green Flag Award itself, eventually. We hope that this will create a virtuous circle of funding, community engagement in the preservation of the garden's wildlife and recognition for the improving quality of the green space.

