

Supporters of Ashton Gardens

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

held on 27th June 2005

Members Present: Chairman, Secretary, Gordon Harvey, Eileen Harvey, Sonia Chapman, Audrey Preston, Kath Bloch and David Meldrum.

Also Present: Terry Dalton, Colin Widmer Barnes and Christine Barnes.

Apologies received from: Jill & Arnold Sumner, Audrey Bex, Betty Higham, Pat Cartmell and Christine Oldroyd. It was reported to the Committee that Audrey Bex was in hospital as a result of a heart attack and the Secretary was instructed to make enquiries and send a card on behalf of the group.

Minutes of the last meeting: Proposal of acceptance was by Gordon Harvey and seconded by Sonia Chapman.

Matters arising: The Chairman reported that he had spoken with Steve Martin, the St. Anne's in Bloom co-ordinator, about using a small cash input from SOAG to kick-start a bulb planting scheme if the Borough Council will approve. He was very enthusiastic.

He intends forming a volunteer team for future improvements, and his idea is to recruit parents through their children in conjunction with their schools. His aim is to plant between 20,000 and 25,000 crocus bulbs along the embankments facing St. George's Road. This could result in around 2,000 plantings of 10 bulbs and provide potential recruits for Steve's team.

The overall cost would probably be about £6,000. SOAG could contribute £200 in cash, the volunteers' time would count as a 'St. Anne's in Bloom' contribution of around £2,500 and the 'Awards for All' lottery fund would be asked to provide the balance of up to £4,000. There may be contributions from elsewhere in addition to this.

The Committee gave its approval to our participation on the understanding that it depends on FBC, the Lottery fund and the volunteers all agreeing to their contributions. Steve is due to return from his holiday within the next few days and will contact the Chairman to up-date him on progress.

Item for information: Updates were delivered on the following items.

5.1 Planning Permission: The Chairman reported that as expected, but with one exception, FBC approved the latest revision of Newfield Jones plans. The Government Office declined to call it in saying it was not of sufficient national importance.

5.2

The meeting was a travesty of how a planning committee should conduct itself. By granting this permission, including their approval of a plan that had only been deposited, with the authority, the previous day and none of them had seen it. The sole exception was Cllr, Howard Henshaw who said that he would not vote for the scheme because it now looked even more like "Colditz" than hitherto. Their credibility was even further brought into doubt as a result of the avoidance of the period for objections which did not expire until after the meeting. They approved the new application in principle and delegated the actual decision to the chief planning officer, enabling him to make formal approval on the day after the period for objections had expired. This suggests that any objections received would be dismissed without the benefit of being

considered by the planning committee. In the Chairman's opinion this is disgraceful behaviour and makes it difficult for him to have any respect for those responsible.

Newfield Jones now have two permissions for apartments. One is in the original location and the other nearly 3 mtrs further away from the Gardens. Depending on what happens with the right of way uncertainty, one of these plans will come into play. At this stage it is not clear if the pathway is to remain in the development or in the Gardens.

- 5.3 Charitable Status: In their attempt to prevent FBC from molesting Lowther Pavilion, the people of Lytham have engaged our barrister, Francesca Quint, who confirmed that the Gardens were held under a charitable trust and that FBC had a statutory duty to apply to the Charity Commission for registration. Both Lowther and Ashton Gardens will be registered to their mutual advantage.
- 5.4 Social Events: The Chairman reported that an excellent visit to Holker Hall had been mildly marred by a combination of laborious pick-up arrangements and a dispute over entry charges to the event. Overall the day was enjoyed by all. Terry Dalton reported that advance bookings for the Summer event at Marton Mere and the Winter event at Courtfield College were good with only a few places remaining available.
- 5.5 Carnival Stall: The Chairman reported that Arnold Sumner had arranged insurance for the day. Audrey Preston reported that everyone was organised for the event, that Bric-a-Brac was still needed for the stall and should be passed to Jill Sumner. Tables for the day were being provided by St. Margaret's Church and will be collected at 8.30 am on the day.
- 5.6 Affiliation: The Secretary reported that he had a meeting with Kath Bloch to consider the options that might be recommended to the Committee. It was felt that the support of some bowling clubs may be wavering due to offers made to them by FBC and Newfield Jones. Kath will be attending a meeting of bowling club representatives shortly and will be able to up-date the Committee on this aspect at the next meeting. It is suggested that we may need to widen our appeal to not only users of the Gardens but firms or organisations who benefit from their existence. Should we offer a vote per organisation at our AGM? Audrey Preston suggested that affiliated groups may weaken our group. Terry Dalton queried the effect it would have on SOAG's standing if we failed to attract support from those we invited to affiliate. David Meldrum recommended that we should not limit our outlook to 'no sale of land' and further proposed that the matter should be held in abeyance for three months. There was no seconder for this proposal. Audrey Preston proposed that the matter be held over until the next meeting, the Secretary seconded this and it was approved by 6 votes in favour with two abstentions.

Items for decision:

- 6.1 FBC proposed lottery bid submission. The Chairman referred the Committee to the documents that had been distributed with the agenda and explained that the extent of the information provided was intended to give members as full a picture of the situation as possible, thereby enabling them to make individual appraisals of the matter. SOAG have been asked to provide a letter of support for the Borough Councils bid for lottery funding. The Technical sub group who have examined the Borough Councils proposals in great detail have set out in their report (distributed with the agenda) their recommendations to the Committee. The TSG believes, on balance, that rather than write in support of FBC's intention, they should express the contra view and make this known to the heritage organisations, but not to the media at this time. They recommend

that the Committee maintain a dignified and principled objection to the re-prioritisation of this bid, for the reasons stated in their report.

Following a lengthy and lively discussion it was decided to send the letter as proposed by TSG but with the following additions and modifications as made by members of the Committee.

- The addition of "open air" in describing the proposed entertainment area.
- The addition of a clarification that a temporary repair of the Ashton Memorial Drinking Fountain was not an acceptable long-term solution.
- The addition of a paragraph stressing the value and importance of the gardens being listed, and that this separates them from other green areas, together with a sentence saying nothing should be done that detracts from the listing rationale, nor anything that risks de-listing.
- The penultimate paragraph to include the statement about public opinion surveys showing opposition to the sale. Also change the wording from "without any contribution from SOAG" to "without any prompting from SOAG" to make the meaning of the sentence more clear.
- The strengthening of the final paragraph to state the view more strongly.
- A copy of the letter is also to be sent to the Civic Society.

7.0 **A.O.B.** It was decided that a newsletter should be sent to all members giving updates on all relevant topics as well as asking for Bric-a-Brac for the Carnival stall and listing the Committee dates for 2005 / 6. Forthcoming social events will be included and a copy of SOAG's letter to FBC will be enclosed.

8.0 **Date and Time of next Meeting:** Monday, 25th July 2005 at 9.30 am