

Friends of the Meadows & Bruntsfield Links

ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18

Preamble

It seems only a few months since our last AGM when my arm was well and truly twisted to stand as convenor, yet here we are again. It's been quite a busy year as the rest of this report shows. I'd like to thank all of my fellow trustees for their great support over the year, especially when I was absent, sometimes for weeks at a time, through a string of illnesses and work commitments. I'd also like to give a very special thank you to Heather Goodare for all the work she put in during her tenure as convenor. She has certainly been a hard act to follow and, as I stated at last year's AGM, I am unable to devote anywhere near the amount of time to FOMBL matters as she did. She worked tirelessly for FOMBL on an almost daily basis. However, with an expanded committee as of last year's AGM, the workload has been spread a bit more evenly between the members and I am very proud of and grateful for the effort they have put in on your behalf. Heather has continued to be a great support and I'm grateful to her for collating and drafting most of this report for me.

In line with the rules of our SCIO constitution, we will not be electing office bearers at the AGM, only trustees. It will then be up to the trustees at their first meeting after the AGM to elect the office bearers from their number.

Board of Trustees

We were delighted to welcome new Trustees at our AGM last year representing local community councils, so that we now have members from all the surrounding councils: Tollcross (Iain Black), Marchmont and Sciennes (Alison Service), and Southside (Joan Carter and Kaaren Haughton), and also Merchiston, though very sadly Robin Morris, who was also our Treasurer as well as representing Merchiston CC, died earlier this year after a long illness. We are very pleased that Jim Orr, who is a qualified accountant, was able to accept our invitation to replace him as Treasurer. Bridget Stevens has also been co-opted by the Trustees to replace Robin as a representative of Merchiston CC: her appointment remains to be confirmed by members at the AGM. We are delighted that she has been able to join us, as she has wide experience of local community work.

Working with the Council

Sadly, the Council too has been affected by sickness: our good friend Mike Shields, Parks and Greenspace Officer, South East, was absent for several months owing to serious surgery, but to our great relief is now back in harness. Jimmy Forrest, Park Ranger, had a stroke and came off his motorbike, and has been out of action for many months: in the meantime we are down to one Park Ranger only (Peter Davidson) for the whole of the Meadows and Links. Margaret Campbell, Partnership Development Officer, South East Locality, another good friend, who kept us up to date with various meetings and opportunities, very sadly died recently: we really miss her. Another sad very sudden death was that of Mark McCathie, who had recently done valuable work painting railings, and in particular the historic Golf Starter's Hut. Moreover, the new Council structure of four localities seems to have resulted in staff cuts, which we deplore. This makes our volunteering even more important.

Voluntary work

During the year we have again been able to work with Primary 6 children from George Heriot's during the autumn, gathering leaves especially round the Mural, where they tend to collect. Further work has consisted of weeding the gutters along Middle Meadow Walk, where Yusef Samari, our new Volunteer Co-ordinator, was able to turn these sessions into wild life tutorials, showing the children the worms buried even in the shallow grass (or 'weeds'), which was carefully recycled to cover nearby bare patches. Yusef has also led work parties for 'grown-ups' on the last Saturday of the month throughout the year. Reports on this work can be found on the FOMBL website: it has ranged from path edging to planting wild-flower

meadows. We are grateful that his PhD studies, on the subject of 'Managing urban green spaces for biodiversity and people' will keep him here for at least another three years.

Public meetings

As usual, we have held three public meetings during the past year. At our AGM on 23 June 2017 our local MP, Tommy Sheppard, whose constituency covers the Meadows, was unfortunately unable to address us at the last minute owing to the hastily called General Election. Instead, Claire Miller, our local Green Councillor (for City Centre) nobly agreed to fill the gap, and gave us a very interesting talk.

In the autumn we met on 6 November 2017 in the Söderberg Pavilion at 1 Lister Square inside Quatermile, and our speaker was the Managing Director of Quatermile, Paul Curran, who gave us an interesting overview of its history.

On 7 December we held an Extraordinary General Meeting (and Christmas party) to ratify the maximum number of Trustees as 15, and to confirm the election of the following members as Trustees: Andy Devenport, Sarah Tolley, Robin Morris, Alec Mann, Neil Roger, Yusef Samari, Joan Carter, Kaaren Haughton, Alison Service, Iain Black, Jim Orr, and Heather Goodare.

In the spring, on 19th March, we met at the Barclay Viewforth Church to look at the Future of Park Management, with three speakers: Alan Bell, Greenspace Manager, Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries Service, Iain Hunter of the Criminal Justice City Wide Services, and our own Yusef Samari, Volunteer Co-ordinator, to look at the problem of herbicides (especially glyphosate) on the Meadows and Links, and how to engage the various work forces available to reduce their use. Although we have plenty of work for them to do, we have not yet been able to engage the Criminal Justice service to help out. We look forward to working with them in the future.

Naming of paths

In sympathy with the spirit of the Suffragist centenary, we are finding names for unnamed paths, particularly on the Links, which is lacking them at the moment, so as to honour those eminent women associated with the area. We have made a start with Muriel Spark, who would have walked across the Links from Bruntsfield Terrace to Whitehouse Loan on her way to school at Gillespie's. We celebrated this on 8th June, with a delightful ceremony and a talk about Muriel Spark by the writer Olga Wojtas. On this occasion, the naming was organized by the Green Councillor for Morningside, Melanie Main, who is our good friend.

Projects

As part of a planned Heritage Trail our Project Manager, Neil Roger, has organized the procurement and installation of information boards at the Helen Acqueroff fountain, and Sundial pillar, with accompanying granite setts. Further information boards are planned. Following the success of the provision of toddlers' play equipment at the Links playground, new equipment has now been installed at the East Meadows toddlers' playground. Exercise equipment has also been provided at the East Meadows, West Meadows and South Links: three more items will follow shortly, and several more projects are on their way. Neil also manages our Facebook page, which now has 300 members. We owe him warm thanks.

Current issues

As noted in the newsletter, barbecues are a 'burning' issue. We need to agree on the necessary measures to prevent further damage to the grass, and also to Council bins. Is the answer a total ban? If so, how would this be policed, given the lack of Parks staff? Do we really want the Meadows on sunny days to become immersed in a fog of carcinogenic smoke? We need the help of members to decide on a sensible policy that can be implemented, given our limited resources.

Cycling is of course a healthy way to travel, and it is now allowed on all tarmac paths on the Meadows and Links, but how can we prevent irresponsible cycling all over the grass, and cycling without regard to the safety of pedestrians?

Finally, we need to express our gratitude to Philip McDowell, who does an excellent job in editing and managing our website. He modestly stands aside from accepting appointment as a Trustee, but in fact does just as much work on behalf of FOMBL as any of the rest of us.

Andy Devenport, Convener