

Runnymede Borough CouncilCabrera Trust Management Committee AGMThursday, 18 July 2024 at 2.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors C Howorth (Chairperson), K Rowsell
Dr P Beesley, P Grobien, G Biswas and M Owen

Members of the Committee absent: Councillor J Hulley

1 Minutes

The minutes of the last AGM held on Thursday 13th July 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Hulley, Mr Try and Mrs Beesley.

3 Chairman's opening remarks

Councillor Howorth welcomed members of the public to the 2024 Annual General Meeting of the Cabrera Trust and introductions were made.

The Cabrera Trust was constituted by Deed of Trust, as amended by a scheme made by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, dated March 1972, and was a registered charity. Runnymede Borough Council was the Trustee.

The Trust was responsible for the management of the open space playing area on Cabrera Avenue and approximately 52 acres of land alongside the River Bourne, known as the Riverside Walk. It was also responsible for the administration of the Trust funds.

The Trust Deed required that the Riverside Walk was maintained for the exercise, recreation and benefit of the inhabitants of Virginia Water and the neighbourhood, and the open space on Cabrera Avenue was to be used as a public recreation for the benefit of the same area.

The Management Committee had been set up by the Trustee to provide a clear local focus for the management of the Trust land. The Management Committee comprised of the three Virginia Water Councillors, together with two Council Officers, acting in the capacity of Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Secretary. In addition to this, the Committee had three co-opted members: Dr Beesley, Mr Grobien and Mrs Owen.

4 Annual report

The Honorary Treasurer presented the statement of financial activity for the year ended 31st March 2024.

The M & G Charifund investment had seen a reduction in value of £2,242 over the year. It was noted that as the tree work hadn't been undertaken this year, creating a saving of £4,000 in the expenditure costs against the budget.

Officers advised that investments were regularly reviewed. For example, previously the trust had also had funds in COIF but these investments were sold over several years to finance the Trusts ongoing expenditure. The Charifund investment which was aimed at charities was retained as this offered a better return. It was pleasing to note that investments had picked up over the last few months. Officers were asked to bring a report on how investments were performing to the next CTMC in January 2025. The current yield on the investments was 5.68%.

It was noted that management and administration recharges had gone down this year. Officers reported that these were checked annually. A Member of the public asked if the Committee could look at the Council's policy on the allocation of these costs to the Trust.

With regards to the tree works, Officers had looked at the accessible trees and it was felt that not all trees previously highlighted needed coppicing. It was noted that the Woodland Trust were visiting in July 2025, and they would at that time carry out a full survey.

Members of the FCTW in attendance reported that it was difficult to get sponsorship when no information on what funds could be spent on (i.e. capital expenditure projects) was available. It was noted that some bridge repairs would be discussed by the CTMC later in the afternoon which would need funding.

Actions: Officers to review the policy on financial allocation and present a report to the next Management Committee - Paul French

Officers to present a report to the next Management Committee detailing how the investments were performing - Paul French

5 Annual inspection of the Trust land

The Committee received notes taken on the annual inspection of the Trust land which took place on Thursday 13th June.

Officers had noted various points which were relayed to the Green Spaces team following the inspection. The Committee received an update from the Green Spaces Team on actions undertaken since the inspection had taken place.

All works allocated to the GM (Grounds Maintenance) team had now been completed barring the removal of the Christmas trees.

Officers reported that the Environment Agency (EA) would be carrying out water sampling next month. This information would help identify why there was no vegetation along the river. The EA would also cover the flooding risks.

Officers reported that they had contacted the Council's legal team regarding drafting letters to residents regarding incursions. The volunteers agreed they would be happy to distribute the letters, by hand when Officers had produced them.

With regard to the Skunk Cabbage, Officers reported that the Council's Green Maintenance team would deal with this in the most effective and efficient way. Officers were asked to report back to the next AGM on what action was taken in this regard.

It was noted that some unsafe bridges and railings had been identified. Officers were asked to display notices on the affected areas to advise members of the public they were

unsafe.

It was noted that the FCTW had been willing to deal with the Himalayan Balsam on the site but had been waiting for clarification from Officers regarding supervision and the possible need for insurance. Officers were asked to look into this as soon as possible and advise the FCTW accordingly.

The FCTW stated that recent work parties had been disappointing due to lack of dialogue with Green Spaces. Officers advised that there was currently acute staffing issues in the team with only 1 ½ Green Space Officers covering the whole borough. It was hoped a new Green Space Manager would be starting in the autumn. Officers would ensure the new Green Space Manager was taken to the site, as soon as possible, so they could familiarize themselves with the area and work needed.

Various members to the FCTW expressed their frustration at not getting a response to emails sent to openspace@runnymede.gov.uk. It was noted that the Egham and Staines volunteers had also emailed the open space address and had not got a response. The FCTW were asked to copy Cllr C Howorth into any emails sent to the Open Space Team in future so he could assist in monitoring responses.

The installation of a dog waste bin being installed at the entrance to the site was discussed. Officers would look into the feasibility of this (with possible re-positioning of existing bin and report back to the next AGM).

Actions: Officers to prepare incursion letters in conjunction with the Council's legal team and then give to volunteers for distribution - Helen Clark

Officers to treat the Skunk Cabbage in the most effective and efficient way and report back to the next AGM on what action was taken – Helen Clark

Officers to produce and display notes on all unsafe bridges/handrails as soon as possible – Helen Clark

Officers to go back to the Council's insurance officers to clarify if volunteers could undertake work without RBC supervision and/or insurance - Helen Clark

(Insurance Officers subsequently confirmed that as long as the Council had a list of all volunteers and a description of the work being undertaken, as long as the work does not involve hazardous machinery or chemicals which would normally require training to operate, supervision should not be necessary).

Officers to take the newly recruited Green Spaces Manager to the trust land as soon as practically possible so they could familiarize themselves with the area and work needed – Helen Clark

Officers to look at the feasibility of a dog waste bin being installed at the entrance to the site (with possible re-positioning of existing bin report back to the next AGM – Helen Clark

6 Discussion forum

The raising of funds by the FCTW via sponsorship was inhibited by no plans in place for capital expenditure over the next 2 – 5 years. (It was noted that previously in the meeting the works needed on the bridge could be something the FCTW could support and use to obtain sponsorship opportunities).

The Honorary Secretary advised that this type of planning would be included in a management plan. He advised that an old management plan had recently been given to him by Democratic Services. A management plan would contain schedule and funding implications in detail. The Honorary Secretary advised that the ideal time to start work on a management plan would be this time next year after visits from the Woodland Trust and the Environment Agency.

An interim plan could be raising capital funds for the bridge repairs. It was confirmed that a sponsorship plaque should be possible after considerations by the Council's Law and Governance team. It was noted that there were sometimes VAT implications relating to sponsorship.

Rather than discuss the Update from Officer report in private. Officers presented the report to all in attendance at the AGM.

Officers reported that resources in the Green Space team had been stretched over 2023/2024. The former Green Spaces Manager and former Tree Officer having left the team. The remaining Green Spaces team consisted of 1 ½ Officers who were presently being supervised by the Corporate Head of Environmental Services.

The in-house grounds maintenance team had started a programme of upskilling to broaden the scope of works deliverable in house. They were now skilled to undertake tree works up to shoulder height. Consequently, the team were now in a position to remove the two fallen trees on Cabrera Trust land. This work would have previously been carried out by a contractor, so this approach saved the trust money. Work was also being carried out to fell two Ash trees which were at risk of falling into Wellington Road.

Works were scheduled to raise the crown of a tree with branches resting on a neighbouring property's roof.

(The meeting ended at 3.50 pm.)

Chair