



## **The Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum**

**Meeting of Directors, 5.00pm on Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

**St John's College, Function Room, Oxford**

**Present:** Sarah J Taylor (in the Chair), Hemlata Bountra, Seonaid Danziger, Anna Nasmyth, Helen Potts and Chris Thorogood.

### **1. Apologies**

Simon Hiscock (represented by Chris Thorogood), Rebecca Mather, Diana Naumann.

### **2. Minutes of the last Board Meeting on 01.03.2023**

The Minutes were approved and signed.

### **3. Matters arising**

- HP said she had looked into the alternatives for donations using contactless payment. It would cost £300pa with a 2.5% fee and she could not recommend this. She said that an alternative would be to use the QR code to take people directly to a payments page. SD said that she was not sure how many people used the QR code and CT noted that this was indeed a good point. SD said that she was happy with the SumUp system for payments at events. The cards cost £100 each and the fees were 1.96%.
- Heidi has been investigating a way of “employing” Freya to get around the problem of access to the University database.
- Jane Annett has taken on Harriet Bretherton’s role as liaison with the Friends of Botanic Gardens Forum. SJT thanked her for this.

### **4. Chairman’s Business**

- SJT said that, at this final meeting, she wished to thank all the trustees for their hard work on behalf of FOBGA.
- She reported that SH had suggested a “Friends Committee”, to include all those currently running events, garden visits etc., be set up. Final details needed to be sorted out. SD said it was essential to have something in place and that this would be a good way forward.

## **5. Secretary's Business**

- AN said that at the Board Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2022, the Board agreed to add Professor Simon Hiscock, Dr Chris Thorogood and the Friends Administrator Grace Denton-Spalding as signatories to the CAF Bank mandate. The Board also agreed that Professor Simon Hiscock and Dr Chris Thorogood be added as signatories to the HSBC account. AN showed the trustees documents to this effect, signed by SJT and herself in their capacity as Chairman and Secretary.
- AN noted that Mr Marius Apetrei would also need to be added to the CAF Bank and HSBC accounts as a signatory. The trustees agreed to this.
- SJT commented that although the signatories would delegate the day-to-day work to others, they would still need to maintain oversight, since they would ultimately be held responsible.

## **6. Treasurer's Business**

- HB had circulated papers before the meeting.
- She noted that there was £300k in cash on deposit for three months at HSBC with another £100k on another deposit, both amounts earning c. 4% interest. Most of this money is for the Paths Appeal. SJT said that she wanted to make clear that the £431k raised so far plus the £55k that went directly to the University was ring fenced for the Paths Appeal. HB would need to agree a date to hand over the funds, with this proviso.
- HB noted that the drawdown of funds was still happening too slowly.
- HP said that the Board had maintained an objective oversight on the allocating of funds to FOBGA and that although in principle funds were generally forthcoming, this had not been the case in all circumstances. In addition, scrutiny had been possible for the reallocation of funds, for example, the £97k that was originally allocated to the propagation unit at the Arboretum, which did not happen at that time. CT said that there would still be a level of scrutiny but that it would now be possible to allocate funds more speedily to immediately topical projects.
- SJT asked for a statement in due course of exact funds held for the Paths Appeal (less expenses yet to be claimed), funds committed to OBGA and not yet claimed, funds available for grants and reserves as at today's date.

ACTION: HB to send an up-to-date statement.

- The Board agreed that the Friends Administrator has been extremely helpful and thanked her.

## **7. Garden Report**

- SH had circulated a paper before the meeting.
- CT said he was pleased to represent SH at the meeting.
- Visitor numbers are doing well although slightly down on the same period last year, probably as a result of the cold weather in March and April. Meanwhile, sales in the shop, Pod and online were

11% higher. Jo Boyes is doing a terrific job, with the best sellers being Physic Gin, Botanic Garden soaps and cosmetics and Harcourt Honey. CT noted there is a balance to be had between high value and high volume. Interestingly, spend per visitor goes down when the visitor numbers are high, probably as a result of lack of space in the shop.

- SH joined a small University delegation invited to Buckingham Palace on 9<sup>th</sup> March. He reported to the King that the Black Pine he had planted in the Garden was doing well and invited him to visit the Arboretum.
- The Vice-Chancellor hosted the inaugural dinner of the Vice-Chancellors Guild at the Garden on 15<sup>th</sup> June. This is a group of high-level benefactors to the University, of which the Friends is one. HP and RM represented the Friends and it was an impressive evening.
- The GLAM registrar, Kevin Rodd is leaving in July. He has been a great supporter of OBG and will be missed.
- The new OBG 5-year Strategic Plan, approved by the Visitors, has been published. The vision is the same but there is a new framework intended to avoid duplicating layers and an emphasis on career development, “investing in people”, partly funded by the Friends.
- The merger of the Friends of OBG charity with OBG/the University is progressing well and will be initiated at the Friends AGM.
- Staff: Lewis Barrett joined OBG as Senior Propagator on 13<sup>th</sup> March and it is very good to have his skills. Jack Willerton, a current OBG apprentice, gained a distinction in his horticultural exams and has since won a place on the Kew Diploma course. Recruitment of an Arboricultural Supervisor at the Arboretum is proving challenging. There is a dearth of arborists. CT has been invited to address the issue of the future of horticulture before a Select Committee at the House of Lords.
- OBG Glasshouse and Capital project: Neither landlord will agree to building in the Lower Garden and this has had a significant impact on the whole project. All development will now have to be accommodated along the riverbank side of the Garden. Grimshaw architects are currently working on a revised concept after extensive discussions with OBG and the design team. Positive discussions are ongoing for the fundraising for this project. SJT noted that David Gann, PVC Development, is a very successful fundraiser.
- Arboretum Visitor and Education Centre NLHF project: the design concept is in hand and the community engagement programme is ongoing but the NLHF, who have been very supportive, nevertheless require a large donor and this donor has not yet been found. In addition, the cost estimates originally submitted by the University Estates department were woefully incorrect. Richard Ovenden’s advice is to prioritise the glasshouses and pause the NLHF application, which means that money can now be spent on the Arboretum paths.
- The propagation facility will be built later this year at the Arboretum. It will consist of two greenhouses, two polytunnels and a potting shed.

- Research: This is generally going very well, with a number of papers and international collaborations. Ben Jones recently returned from a trip to Japan to resurrect the “Japan Project” after the lifting of the pandemic restrictions; CT was the first Visiting Professor to the University of the Philippines Department of Forestry; and SH visited Sicily for a meeting with collaborators on the *Senecio* project on Mount Etna. CT has recently had a paper accepted by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

## 8. Membership

- RM had circulated a report before the meeting.
- There had been a disappointing drop in membership numbers and membership was now below the level before the pandemic. 34 new members joined but this is low for this time of year. It is more a question of people not joining rather than leaving and the reasons are unclear. There needs to be further advertising in the Welcome Centre, which is the main source of new members, and SJT wondered if perhaps the Friends were not being promoted there as they had been. CT said that they were going to discuss membership at the next meeting, including possibly cancelling the Annual membership, which some found confusing, and whether to allow dogs at the Arboretum, possibly with two zones. This last was felt to be a question that needs revisiting since many people who appreciated the natural environment were also dog owners.
- Sally Orriss opened her garden for Friends in May and raised money for OBGA by selling cakes and tea. Two further Friends have offered to open next year.

## 9. Events & Volunteers

- SD had circulated a report before the meeting.
- She thanked the Events Team and other volunteers for their energy, enthusiasm and commitment, which made the events such a success.
- The new banners looked good and should be up at every event and it might be good for the volunteers to have badges. A secure and dry area has been found for the tombola items and the May morning lighting provided by the Garden staff was much appreciated.
- The coffee mornings are going well and SD uses them as a chance to update members. There has been great cooperation from the Garden for these and Jo is especially helpful.

## 10. Danby Patron Group

- SJT reported a very good visit to the Medicinal Beds at OBG. She said she would need to employ caterers for the next Danby event and the Board agreed this was reasonable.
- SJT needs someone/several people to help run the Danby Patron Group and wondered if the Garden Visits team might know of people. She also planned to mention it in her AGM speech.

## 11. Bobarts Patron Group

- HP had circulated a report before the meeting.
- HP did not want to add anything to the report but said that she and Claire also needed help and asked SJT to mention that too at the AGM.

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#### **12. Garden Visits**

- SJT reported that these were going well but it was important to ensure that Freya was still employed.

#### **13. A.O.B.**

There was none.

#### **ACTION POINTS**

- HB to supply SJT with an update of the various categories of funds held at this handover date.

The meeting ended at 6.15pm and was followed by the Friends AGM in the Garden Auditorium of St John's College.