

MELTON PARK MANAGEMENT COMPANY LIMITED
Minutes of the 20TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Tuesday 22nd October 2019 at 7.30pm at St Audry's Sports and Social Club,
Lodge Farm Lane, Melton

Present

Andy Etherington - Director/Resident
Clare Burgess - Director/Resident
Geoff Munns - Director/Resident
Roger Harrison - Director/Resident
Sean McTernan - Director/Resident
Alan Murray - Secretary/Resident
67 shareholders from 53 properties

Welcome

Andy Etherington opened the meeting, welcoming all members, thanking them for attending in such numbers. He indicated that a change in the order of items had been agreed by the Board in order to let the guest Woodlands expert Andrew Falcon, speak early in the proceedings.

Apologies for absence

Martin Oldfield, Judith Buchanan, Phillip and Jane Bevan-Jones, Robyn and Richard Llewellyn, Christine Gosling, Heather Marshall, John Page, Clive Barnett, David Greenwood, Julia Robinson, Ivan Turner.

1. Approval of AGM minutes held on 16th October 2018

The minutes of the previous meeting having been circulated were confirmed by the members, proposed by AE, seconded by Mike Cummings and carried unanimously.

2.To receive and consider the Directors Report, Statement of Accounts and Balance sheets for the year ending 31st of January 2019:

AE introduced Clare Burgess(CB), MPMC Finance Director who spoke to the circulated accounts extracts. The Board's aim has been to achieve a reserve of at least a year's income so that unforeseen exceptional costs can be met. In order to remain compliant with the Financial Services Compensation Scheme guarantee and to cope with a decreased interest rate on the current account, a new savings account has been opened with HSBC. The detailed profit and loss account were then considered. Questions on the accounts were invited but none arose. AE proposed that the accounts were adopted, seconded by Jenny Panting and carried.

4. Re-election of directors of the company

Andy Etherington indicated that as is usual, with the circulated AGM papers he had invited new nominations for directors, but none had been received. He indicated that in all previous years, any individuals nominated had always been elected in exchange for a standing director volunteering to retire. Andy asked the assembled shareholders whether they would consider re-election of the current directors *en bloc* or as individuals. Strong support was given to *en bloc* election. Andy Etherington then proposed that all directors were re-elected, seconded by Ed Burgess and carried. Andy Etherington then thanked all the directors for their efforts, which was strongly supported from the floor.

5. To approve the proposed budget and service charge for 2020-21

AE referred to the Budget rationale distributed with the AGM papers and reiterated that the bulk of the costs are ongoing and unavoidable. A specialist Forestry Commission survey is in preparation (Autumn 2019) and will influence future plans for the woods with an outlook of 10-20 years. As stated at previous AGMs, as the development matures and ages, we face the possibility of using our cash reserves should for emergency repairs on drains, roads and walls etc. Estimates for the resurfacing of worn areas of some of our tar/shingle roads are currently out to tender. At 31st January 2019 the reserve stood at £94331, however, the planned road resurfacing is likely to make a significant call on this figure. The Board considers that for the forthcoming year, the Service Charge can be kept at the current level of £375. Questions and queries were invited from the floor. None were made. AE proposed that the budget for the forthcoming year be approved, this was seconded by Clive Watling and carried unanimously.

6. To receive a presentation on the woodlands and consider future management.

AE indicated that at last year's AGM questions were raised whether a more structured plan for our long-term woodland management should be developed. The Board therefore commissioned reports on how this might be achieved. AE emphasised, that no definitive plan had been conceived and that this was "work in progress" this presentation being part of the process of informing the shareholders as to possible courses of action. An annotated map of the woodland areas was distributed so that the various areas described could be located.

Andrew Falcon (AF) of New Woods Forestry was then introduced. His remit was to survey and produce a short report with the aim of giving advice on the age and state of health or disease in our trees. The second aim was then to produce a management plan, grant aided by the Forestry Commission. This initially necessitated rural land registration of the woodland, now complete. The contract for the funding for developing the management plan has now been received. The plan will contain proposals for felling and restocking, with a 10 year licence for felling, over a 20 year management plan. Plainly felling would be at MPMC's discretion.

AF then described the defined areas of the woodlands in detail.

Compartment 1 - The western area and path (from Cages Way to rear of Bowls Green area) contains mostly declining horse chestnut with health and safety risks mitigated by our surveys and inspection. Due to its high use as a walkway the deer and rabbit population is low, such that if felling is undertaken, then replanting would be unnecessary as robust natural regeneration will occur. Some previously replanted trees have struggled for light and moisture and succumbed. Self-regenerating trees tend to be stronger.

Compartment 3A (from Bowls Green area to rear of 5 Thomas Churchyard Close) - This area is something of a mess with much diseased ash of poor form with ivy cover. Close inspection has revealed some good oak, cherry and an elm amongst the ash, that would form a good surviving population if the area was thinned by selectively removing the diseased ash.

Compartment 3B (adjacent Thomas Churchyard Close and main play area) - This area contains a few oaks and several diseased ash. This area would benefit from opening up and replanting.

Hospital Grove 2A (the most distant area adjacent Notcutts and the slip-road). This area contains mostly mature oak with recent canopy reductions and planting. Many of the oak are dying back, due to "acute oak decline", caused by trees being stressed, probably due to climatic change, producing conditions for beetle larval infestation. Black tarry sap streaks are apparent, typical of the condition. This area would benefit from felling 6 or more trees, retaining the better specimens with some replanting. Simply reducing the canopy of existing trees is relatively expensive whereas felling will introduce more light to promote new growth.

Hospital Grove 2B - (the northern aspect of the remains of Hospital Grove either side of the main northern path). This area is 85% diseased and aged ash.

Hospital Grove 2C - (south of the main southern path). This is the most vibrant area with natural regeneration from the time of the '87 gale, but it is overcrowded and needs thinning. Ash disease is present.

Steve Abbott stated that he thought that the presentation was exclusively "tree oriented" and gave no regard to conservation of habitat or biodiversity and that senescence in trees was a good thing. AF's brief was specifically to report on the trees. Steve Abbott contended that the area is one of "ancient woodland" evidenced by the presence of bluebells, wood anemone and yellow archangel. AF suggested that the area was not formally recognised as such, Jenny Panting indicated that an attempt to obtain ancient woodland recognition was sought 20 years ago but was unsuccessful on grounds of species number.

AF indicated that there are 4 main lines of argument in forestry management - amenity, health and safety, conservation and commercial. AF asserted that to continue our own piecemeal approach was possible but not optimal for the long term future of the woodland, equally we could adopt a more aggressive approach by removing diseased areas and opening the canopy to allow growth. The trees are all covered by tree preservation orders, relevant to any future planning.

AE reassured the meeting that no plan was yet conceived. This presentation was to help in formulating opinion for the future. It is to look at the current and likely future state of the woodland and to explore what grant aid might be available. Assurance was sought from the floor that any invasive plan would need the support of the shareholders and not just the Board. AE confirmed that when a range of possible options had been worked up and costed then these would be discussed by the Board and recommendations would be put forward to the shareholders. Possibly a small area of woodland might be selected as a test area of such a plan.

Chris Hutton-Williams asked what proportion of ash might need felling in areas 3A and 3B. AF responded that it was not possible to be precise, recent scientific opinion is changing and that ash tree death from die-back might be as low as 40% rather than the 90% previously widely predicted. Forestry Commission grants for replanting are available if ash felling is undertaken. A decision needs to be in part based on 20-50 year time horizons. An argument for the felling of ash on grounds other than health and safety could be made and will allow the regeneration of other species and new planting. The area necessary to be felled to allow growth depends on what species are left or replanted, e.g. oak is light demanding. Broadly speaking, a tree needs a space clear of other trees one and a half times its own height, to allow adequately sustained growth. AF also indicated that if replanting is considered as an option, then grey squirrel control will be necessary to allow sustained growth. He then concluded, indicating that his report was about to be submitted to the Forestry Commission and will then be available to the Board.

Peter Booth Smith asked about the many large Horse Chestnuts on the Estate. AF indicated that most are mature and that their lifespan is limited, and limb drop may become a particular problem. Leaf-miner disease is very prevalent.

AE thanked Andrew for his presentation and reiterated that the forestry aspect of our woodlands is but one aspect and the Board will consider conservation and biodiversity. The floor responded with a hearty round of applause.

7. To receive an update on the Hopkins Homes Bowling Green planning application.

AE introduced the item by reminding shareholders of the MPMC remit. The Board of Directors is made up of elected volunteers. MPMC is mandated to set the service charge, collect it and spend it on company assets; the roads, landscaped areas and woodlands etc. The Board often takes on additional work and informs shareholders of relevant activity, that might affect them (for example planning applications), collating and disseminating information, emphatically leaving it to shareholders to decide how they act on that information. MPMC is not mandated to spend company resources to fight planning issues between shareholders. A recent example being that concerning St Audry's House, where MPMC were unable to become involved, it was a matter for local residents and the council, which ultimately led to a lengthy and expensive court case. MPMC has a firm policy of deferring to the planning authorities on issues of planning consent.

A lively and lengthy debate ensued concerning Hopkins Homes Ltd planning application to develop the former bowling green, the MPMC position, various residents' point of view and the founding of the "Community Scheme Association" by various Melton Park Residents.

Contributions to the debate were made by:

Rob Mills, Chris Hutton-Williams, Ginny Besly, Gary Nethercote, Richard Fergusson, Jenny Panting, Andy Etherington, Geoff Munns, Sean McTernan.

The debate can be summarised as:

- That HHL has withdrawn its planning application to build 3 detached houses on the former bowling green, but it is understood that the company will re-submit an application.
- MPMC is unable to commit company resources to opposing planning consent issues between shareholders, unless MPMC assets are under threat.
- MPMC has made various representations to the councils, individual councillors and planning committees reminding them of the S106 Agreement pertaining to the former bowling green. MPMC is not a party to the S106 Agreement on the former bowling green.
- MPMC applauds the founding of the Community Scheme Association (CSA) by Chris Hutton-Williams and colleagues.
- Chris Hutton-Williams and colleagues would very much prefer for MPMC to commit company resources to opposing the HHL planning application. Various MPMC directors explained why MPMC is unable to do so.
- The CSA is exploring the possibility of invoking a "right to buy" of the bowling green.
- Some individuals raised the concern that if the S106 Agreement on the former bowling green is set aside, then this may set a precedent for the same to occur with the St. Audry's golf club land.
- Jenny Panting reiterated that it is up to each individual to make their views known to the Council and planning authority, rather than to expect MPMC to do so.
- Rob Mills suggested that MPMC should write to HHL and offer to buy the former bowling green at agricultural land value of around £7000 per acre rather than at residential development land value. The wider audience at the AGM did not appear to concur that it was likely that HHL would view this suggestion favourably.
- Richard Webb asked the directors for confirmation that company money would not be spent on opposing any planning application. AE again confirmed that company money would only be spent if company assets were under threat.

AOB

Cycling in the woods

Mrs Holles-Perkes believes the signage in the woodland concerning cycling to be ambiguous. AE responded that we would look into the situation and consider new signage.

Parking on Thomas Churchyard Close

A resident raised that walkers and possibly non-residents are parking on the bend in Thomas Churchyard Approach causing an obstruction and not contributing to the upkeep of the woods. AE responded that it would not be possible to prevent non-residents from accessing the woods and that the place immediately in question was the entrance to a public bridleway. AE agreed that we would examine the parking aspect.

Footpath usage adjacent Bowling Green area

Bryony Abbott, a resident and local Parish (non-planning) councillor said that she was canvassing support to establish a legal right of foot passage into the woods, from Garrod Approach along the currently Hopkins-owned access road (to 14/16 Garrod Approach) to the rear of the old bowls pavilion into the woods. It would appear from the recently withdrawn planning application that this access will be closed off. To request the County Council to recognise this path she needed residents who use the path to volunteer to complete a specific Council evidence form and that she was prepared to coordinate the response. This received support from the floor.

Children, Cycling, Speed and Signage

A resident of Thomas Churchyard Close raised concern for the safety of young children on bicycles and walkers because of cars moving on Thomas Churchyard Road and parking on the bend adjacent the woods entrance. She asked for speed or children playing signs to be considered. AE agreed that the MPMC Board will look into it.

Noise nuisance from children playing

John Meadowcroft stated that all residents should be aware that the open landscaped spaces are for the quiet enjoyment of residents but lately children use it as a play area, running, shouting and using bicycles. It would be helpful if it could be minuted that there are covenants governing activities on the site. AE responded that we do have a recurrent ebb and flow of children and complaints regarding behaviour, but that it is difficult and possibly not desirable to forbid children from playing. Linda Steward, resident in Scott Lane suggested that she greatly enjoyed seeing children on their cycles but that there are blind bends running into Garrod Approach. She had received various responses when bringing safety issues to the notice of the children and felt strongly that it was the responsibility of parents to supervise their children adequately. AE responded that the Board would consider including a note in the Newsletter.

House Insulation Circular

Peter Booth-Smith raised the recent circular letter from the County Council regarding the insulation of houses, the installation of solar panels and that it is likely in the future that the government might enforce a change in gas boiler usage. He asked that MPMC look into the matter regarding the solar panels and covenant issues. AE said that he would try to do so.

Tenanted Properties

David Cole stated that some tenanted properties appeared not to be kept in good external repair and appearance and does the management committee communicate with the owners and agents about these problems? AE confirmed that the Board had entered into communication when appropriate in the past.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.