



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Bernards Heath held on Saturday February 1st 2025 at the Jolly Sailor

- 1) Welcome and apologies:
 - a) DP welcomed all attendees, including councillors Chris Brattle (St Albans District Council - SADC) and Helen Campbell (SADC and Hertfordshire County Council).
 - b) Apologies were received from CHo and HS.
- 2) The March 16th 2024 AGM minutes were approved without comment.
- 3) Election of Chair and Committee:
 - a) Rod Keat (RK) has handed-over FoBH website management to Polly O'Connor (PO'C) and resigned from the committee, he was thanked for his decade of web-site management and improvement.
 - b) Sandie Taylor was welcomed to the committee.
 - c) All other committee members were re-elected: David Pearce (Chair), Peter Cook, Martin Taylor, Jenny Faldon (Newsletter Editor), Roger Miles (Tree Warden), Mary North (Treasurer), Chris Hartgroves (Secretary), Hannah Salji, Polly O'Connor (Webmaster), and Caroline Holmes (Social Media).
- 4) Lower Field & Ariston Site update:
 - a) Formal planning application for the building of up to 48 dwellings on the Ariston Site was expected by the end of 2024, but has not yet happened.
 - b) The Lower Field is no longer designated a potential primary school site, local demographics indicate no need for more schools presently.
 - c) The fenced-off Lower Field areas remain (indefinitely) due to the uncertain stability of the Lower Field ground.
 - d) The Pioneer Club will now not be 'reprovisioned' (rebuilt on the southern part of the old Fire Station site). As a valued youth resource (and the oldest UK indoor skate-park), development / refurbishment of the current site is wanted – formal planning application has not yet occurred.
 - e) HC reported that –
 - i) Hertfordshire County Council remains 'very quiet' concerning plans (they own the Lower Field); Heathlands School is also frustrated by the lack of clear plans for the area.
 - ii) The derelict old Fire Station and Judo Club buildings require demolition, they are now 'vandal-magnets'.
 - iii) Development of the Muriel Green Nursery (in Church Crescent) will encompass Youth Services facilities previously planned for incorporation in a reprovisioned Pioneer Club.
 - iv) Outline planning approval has been given for 148 dwellings between the St Albans Girls' School (STAGS) and the Texaco garage. An area further north is identified on the submitted Local Plan as a possible site for housing, to meet government targets.
- 5) Review of FoBH activities since last AGM:
 - a) The Upper Field playground refurbishment was completed (driven by the Let's Play at Bernards Heath charity).
 - b) HS and PO'C (in particular) put a lot of work into what turned out (on the first warm and sunny day of the year) to be a very successful picnic on the Upper Field, celebrating 25 years of FoBH, and increasing awareness and membership of FoBH.
 - c) Roger Miles (FoBH Tree Warden) reported:
 - i) The 2 oak saplings planted last February in a glade by the cycle path by Heat Farm Lane are doing well; all were invited to return in 50 years or so, to see how they're getting on.
 - ii) The necessary felling of an ailing nearby Norwegian Maple left a stump that requires grinding-out before a replacement can be planted. An estimate for the work has been passed to the SADC Tree Officer.



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Bernards Heath held on Saturday February 1st 2025 at the Jolly Sailor

- iii) The laurels at the SE corner of the Upper Field were (finally) cut-back, but left significant waste behind – RM has ‘consolidated’ this.
 - d) A Working Party cleared suckers from Sandridge Road trees; SADC were asked to take away the resultant piled waste, but have not yet.
 - e) Beech Bottom Dyke (BBD): after a triennial survey, up to 60 trees have been marked for pruning or felling. CB noted that the work should be completed by the end of March.
 - f) DP’s request for shade trees by the playground should be met by this year’s planting season plans.
 - g) Sandridge Road Wastes (SRW):
 - i) SADC are to remind residents of the rules regarding not parking and not constructing driveways across the wastes. However, enforcement is not expected.
 - ii) JF noted that the garage’s signs are still displayed, and that they park customers’ cars on the wastes, damaging the ground.
 - h) PO’C reported on <https://bernardsheath.org/>:
 - i) The cost of website hosting has risen from £42 per annum to £116! We are ‘locked-in’ until 2027.
 - ii) Domain name, hosting, and WordPress accounts have been transferred to Chair, with PO’C holding administration accounts.
 - iii) A page and menu restructure has been undertaken to improve navigation and remove security vulnerabilities, but unsupported software (cause by a spat between suppliers) has caused temporary removal of access to some information and images.¹
 - iv) Data from the last six months show between 150 & 250 monthly visitors to the site. Monthly page views are between 270 & 425, mostly of the maps pages.
 - v) The newsletter is now emailed using Mailchimp (an App free until we reach 500 subscribers). Currently we have 433 subscribers, with an excellent email opening rate - showing that people on our emailing list want to be there!
 - i) Prior to the AGM CHo reported 696 Facebook followers and 235 Instagram followers, with plans to increase social media presence.
- 6) Plans for 2025/26:
- a) Continue to organise biannual Action Days, primarily to remove litter; the next will be on Sunday March 23rd.
 - b) Continue to organise ad hoc working parties as required.
 - c) Our expiring 5-year plan will be renewed, possibly by a 10-year one.
 - d) With no definite plan yet, a possible memorial to the 1461 2nd battle of St Albans will be discussed in committee again.
- 7) Treasurer’s Report, and presentation of accounts: Noting that the FoBH financial year was to the end of September, Mary North (MN) reported –
- a) There are healthy balances in our accounts, the bulk of funds in an interest-bearing deposit account;
 - b) Income and expenditure were both lower than previously, the SADC-supported paths maintenance project being completed.
 - c) Web-site costs have increased (as noted above).
 - d) The picnic incurred some extraordinary expenses.
 - e) FoBH has 156 member families, subscription income rising by 8%.
 - f) 1800 newsletters were delivered.

¹ PO’C had some help from the local community on hosting knowledge, and would be grateful for further help on security vulnerabilities and web hosting.



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Bernards Heath
held on Saturday February 1st 2025 at the Jolly Sailor

- 8) Appointment of Auditor for 2025/26: David Keen will continue to be FoBH's auditor.
- 9) Any other business:
 - a) It was noted that the Asset of Community Value (ACV) designation will require renewal in 2027.
 - b) The swampy area between the Upper and Lower Fields was noted as a continuing nuisance. Signage has been installed, but there are no plans to remedy it.
 - c) A boot-scraper, by 'the laurels' was deemed desirable; DP will ask Try Time if they would provide one, also for more diligence from them in clearing mud from the pavement after their sessions. Otherwise, SADC may supply.
 - d) HC thanked FoBH for their work.
 - e) MN asked HC to investigate the replacement of the litter-bin that was (probably) removed to facilitate gas-main repairs opposite Seymour Road.
 - f) DP will enquire about renewal / revision of the SADC Green Spaces Plan.