

Annual General Meeting

5.30pm 19 October 2020

Held online due to pandemic quarantine restrictions.

Present

Trustees: Chris Heaton, Jamie Darwen, Anne Sharp, Sally Jones, Bonnie Hewson, Stefan Edwards, Emma Thomas, Laura Evans

Members: Allie Gillet Dillon, Drew Stiles, Laura Demery, David Demery, Alice Marshment, Jo Sayers, Tony Rees, Sam O'Sullivan, Liam Dillon, Tessa Fitzjohn, Lal Heaton, Finbar Cullen, Christine Higgott, Kelly Sheldrick, Tamsin Clay Bee, Iwona Tempowski, Alix ?, Heather ?

Staff: Steve Sayers, CEO

Proxies: Hazel Winter, Emma Earle, Ceri Thorne, Mike Lees, Gregg McDonald, Noemí Balaguer Gimenez, Laura Llamas, Wesley DeRish, Sally Monks, Beth Kirkland, Harry Kauntze, Emily Malcolm, Aneurin Rainbird, Karen Burns, Jennie Smith, Sophie Mawby, Richard Edwards, Emylia Etherington, Martha Lewis, Ciaran O'Reilly, Frances Webb, Pieta Karoniemi, Roxy Leurquin, Flavien Leurquin, Stacy Yelland, James Mair, Toni Hutchinson, Bryony Rutter, Victoria Bending, Laura Churchill, Katy Edwards, Nadja Grubitzsch

Apologies: Sally Royle, Tim Plummer

Notes

Chris Heaton welcomed members to the AGM. Apologies had been received from Sally Royle and Tim Plummer.

The Board recommended approval of the minutes of the 2019 AGM. Approved by vote.

Presentation of Annual Report and Accounts

Chris Heaton gave a summary of the highlights of the 2019-2020 year observing that it had closed just ahead of the major impact of measures taken to tackle the global pandemic.

Highlights included:

- The nursery was inspected by Ofsted in June 2019 and received a 'good' rating. It also attained the 'Bristol Standard' indicating the quality of provision that we provide to families in our local community.
- The Outdoor Learning department had a record year with very high demand from schools for visits. We saw 2500 school-child visits through the year, many of whom returned to visit with their families.
- The Health and Social Care team won a small part in a large 10-year contract to deliver psychological therapies, giving the opportunity (yet to be realised) to work outside Bristol.
- The farm and gardens had a very productive year and work closely with the café team to produce food for the café.
- The café itself continued to grow its reputation and to serve as the social hub of the organisation.

- We continued to monitor the developments in Bedminster Green, lobbying for the provision of community space through engagement with local people, the local authority and developers.
- We hosted an number of large events through the year each drawing around 1500 people to the site. In Dec we hosted a polling station for the first time.
- Also in December, a celebration of the life of Belinda Sully was held n the café. Belinda paed away earlier that month. She had been a long-time volunteer and supporter of the farm and a larger-than-life character who is sadly missed.
- Chris finished his summary by thanking the extra-ordinary team of staff and volunteers at the farm, noting that 10% of the work time was given freely by volunteers (around 10,000 hours), both in supported and independent groups.

Jamie Darwen gave a summary of the finances for the year

We are looking at the accounts for the financial year which ended on 31 March 2020 – which now feels like a completely different world! These accounts include none of the impact of the pandemic or the lockdown.

Headline figures:

- A significantly better position than the previous year.
- A small loss on paper of £12,191 compared with a loss of £94,011 in 2019
- Our unrestricted funds – which is money we can do what we want with, rather than being committed to particular projects – showed a profit of £16,055.
- At the end of the year the consolidated unrestricted reserves stood at £229,478 (2019: £213,423).

As usual, these numbers look worse than our real cash position, because of depreciation charges. Once we take these into account (with some other minor factors), we see (page 18) that our cash position has improved by £88,249.

Some of this improvement is just down to timing – last year looked worse and this year looks better, just because of the timing of some payments and expenses across the financial year. So this doesn't necessarily show a sustainable upwards trajectory – even disregarding the impact of the pandemic.

Despite our success in earning income through trading, charitable fundraising remains a critical part of maintaining the sustainability of the organisation – in particular to enable it to meet its social aims. We were successful in 14 of the 23 bids that we submitted, a higher number and ratio of success compared to the previous year (7 out of 17). This led to an increase of over £100,000 in income from grants – mostly accounted for by a significant capital project (£117,000 for a new studio to replace the derelict container by the sports pitch).

Income from the trading subsidiary (largely the café) was up by about £17,000 this year.

None of these figures show the impact of the pandemic, which has thrown most of our forecasting out of the window.

The general picture is that we survived the lockdown period when most of our activities were shut down – coming out in a reasonably healthy position, thanks largely to the furlough scheme which paid most of our staff costs.

We now have most of our staff back at work, but very uncertain times ahead. In particular, it is very difficult to make forecasts of income as we have little evidence to base these on. Our current forecasts make assumptions of 30% drop in café sales, and 10% drop in nursery income – but these could turn out to be wildly off the mark. We also expect grant income to be harder to come by.

One measure we look at closely is when our forecasted bank balance drops below £200k. At the moment, we are projecting this to happen in January 2022. This still gives us some time – but is nearer than we would like. We continue to look to raise funds to push this date further back, rather than to cut costs – but we will need to monitor this very closely in the coming months.

In summary – our recent years of good financial management, a successful track record of fund-raising, and diverse income streams, give us some resilience and a stronger position than many charities at the moment. However, clearly very challenging times are ahead.

Questions

Christine Higgott asked what the factors are that are used in forecasting?

Answered by Jamie. We start with last year's position then make adjustments as necessary. Some elements are reasonably stable with seasonal variations that we can predict. It is more difficult at the moment due to uncertainty of pandemic.

Appointment of Auditors

The Board's recommendation of Corrigan Associates to continue as auditors was accepted.

Election of Trustees

Three trustees stood down: Chris Heaton (retiring), Tim Plummer and Sally Royle.

Tim Plummer and Sally Royle were re-elected.

One trustee had been co-opted mid year and needed to stand for election.

Laura Evans was elected.

Chris Heaton's Retirement

The board thanked Chris for his time on the board of trustees (over 10 years). Chris joined in 2009 when the organisation was in a difficult position and had helped to steer it to its current success. He was given some gifts in recognition of his contribution and a print will be placed in the café to celebrate his time on the board.

Future plans

Steve Sayers gave an update on some projects currently underway.

Studio Build

Delayed by pandemic, but now on track for completion around Christmas.

Will provide desk space for about 6 people.

To be rented out to a suitable group to provide income & hopefully footfall & compatible activity.

Orchard Re-development

Project to create a 'secluded' space for education, therapy and parties.

Shelter, outdoor kitchen, fire pit, fairy lights. Pond, compost loo, gardening space.

Success in securing £34k. Need to raise £3.4k – have crowd-funder launched at the weekend (nearly half-way there).

Off-site possibilities

Bedminster Green

Continue to try to win some community space in the BG development. We're getting smiles and positive responses from councillors, officers, developers. We need to see that turn into something real.

"As and when" project given all the other pressures that we have.

Hartcliffe Farm

BCC have a call for expressions of interest. We're likely to put something together with a partner organisation based in Hartcliffe. There are lots of risks (constraints on the land, politics, incumbent tenants). We will only proceed if there are clear benefits for both people in Hartcliffe and WHCF itself.

Members' questions

A question on the work at Bedminster Green was asked by Tessa Fitzjohn. Steve elaborated further on our work to lobby for community space in the development.

Drew Stiles asked when we might see a return of the Reception function at the farm and offered to support a volunteer reception in the mean time. Steve responded that we hope to see reception return in the new year, depending on the restrictions in place for the ongoing pandemic and thanked him for his offer.

Sam O'Sullivan asked for more details of the crowd funding appeal for the redevelopment of the Orchard.

Meeting closed at 1830.

