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Ordinary General Meeting of the Friends of Cammo held outdoors at the Cammo Local Nature Reserve on Wednesday 8th September 2021 at 7pm.

Present:- Nick Bengé Chairperson, Simon Gillam Secretary, Lynn Whitehead Treasurer, Karen Edwards Membership Secretary, Gill Harris, Callum Towns, Grahame Whitehead, Peter Scott, Marian Allen, Julie Wilkinson, Esther Davidson, Harry Taylor, Sheena McRobie, Judy Arrowsmith, RG (Bert) Scott, Claire Wallace, Eileen Nicoll and Rachel Stewart.

Apologies:- Shay Dean, Michael Roe, David Kyles, Cllr Norman Work, Carol Turnbull, Douglas Macfarlane, Katherine Thomson, Joanna Morris, Martyn Hawthorn and Anne Currie.

Matters discussed

1. Announcement of Shay Dean's retirement from the Committee

2. Membership update

Karen Edwards reported that our aspiration to have 200 members had been achieved with the current total standing at 204. In the membership year for 2020/2021 we had 27 new members and this membership year so far we have 16 new members which is a good figure bearing in mind that we have had no working parties, social events or gate days. Nick mentioned that 30 members had still not paid their fees but this will be followed up by Karen and Lynn.

3. Treasurers report

Lynn Whitehead reported that there was £5661 in the bank made up as follows:-

Restricted Funds £860.00

Specifically for the following -

- £215 for the production of INFORMATION PANELS - £730 was paid on 16/5/21 leaving £215 still to spend.
- £245 for ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS
- £100 for the WETLAND PROJECT
- £300 for PLANTING OF TREE SAPLINGS IN 2021 - this donation was received this year - all the others were received in previous years.

GENERAL FUNDS - £4,801

General Funds are up £459 since the previous year end.

Subscriptions and donations are similar to 2020 at £1,900 and there have been no unusual items of expenditure.

4. The Wetland Project

Nick Bengé advised that this project is being managed by Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust with input from Landscape Architect Liz Thomas. An Ecological Report had recently been produced which did not have any adverse comments and as long as it passes planning the project should go ahead quite quickly. Some of the members said that they had not seen any of the plans for the Wetland, but Nick and Simon advised that although the original design for the Wetlands had been done by Nick the full plans required for planning approval, compiled by Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust had not been shared with any of us, and David Kyles had undertaken that they will be shared with the Friends of Cammo as well as the Cammo Estate Advisory Committee before planning approval is sought. Peter Scott commented that there were things which needed to be added like the water trough and we didn't know whether they were going to be. Other questions were raised as to whether the trough would dry out, could there be a problem with dogs in the wetland interfering with nesting birds and whether the depth of the water in the wetland would be a safety issue. Nick did not believe that the trough would dry out and dogs presently swam in the canal without adversely affecting the birds. Generally the depth of the water would be quite shallow, although some more inaccessible areas could be deeper. Nick made his designs for the wetlands available for people to see and we await sight of the final ELGT plans.

5. Hedgerow Planting

Nick distributed sketches of the suggested locations of the hedgerow planting and outlined the rationale for the scheme, which developed as a result of the challenges to the park's environment caused by the extra visitors during lockdown. The proposed 1500 metres of hedgerows will add structure and vegetation to the park without disrupting the views or field paths, cut down access to the field borders to protect wildlife and increase biodiversity. The Friends of Cammo first did a similar planting 16 years ago and it has been very successful. David Kyles agrees with this scheme and we are awaiting the approval of a new Council framework that will enable selection of a supplier and appointment of a contractor to do the work. Although we have had volunteer work parties to do tree planting before, the scale of this project is too big, although we will oversee it. Apparently, David Jamieson, head of Greenspaces and Parks has the funds to cover the cost of the plants and materials (£6500) and the contractors, so no financial contribution will be sought from Friends of Cammo.

Sheena McRobie asked what sorts of species were planned. Nick responded that they would be mostly low hedgerow types, and added that there aren't many places where you can plant trees and plant them well, but that Cammo was one of them.

Simon added that we have money in funds set aside specifically for trees, which must be spent this year. Nick said that this could be part of the 'plant a tree for the jubilee' initiative which could be done as a Friends of Cammo work party. A question was asked as to where these would be located and Nick advised either with the rest of the hedgerow or at the top of North Field. There were some objections to this as it was felt that this would interrupt the views. Peter Scott suggested that we could use the trees to reinforce the main avenues within the park which was thought to be a possibility subject to space. The idea of planting bigger trees in specific places within the fields was considered to be problematic as it may cause long term intrusion into the open space environment which the park enjoys.

Peter Scott raised an objection to the trees planned near the water trough which is intended to incorporate a disabled access path and a seating area as he felt that the proposed trees would mar the view of those seated there. Nick said that he was happy for anyone to come up with an alternative plan but that he would be happy to discuss this further with Peter.

Claire Wallace wondered why if the council were in favour of supporting hedgerow planting they decimated the hedgerows along Cammo Walk with very harsh cutting back. It seems that there are two council departments involved here and that it is the roads department which is responsible for the roadside hedges and the parks department. David Kyles has tried in the past to intervene but without success. It was felt that an approach to the roads department from Friends of Cammo supporting David's view might be productive.

6. Bees

There are presently 4 hives in the walled garden and there are two frames of honey which we hope to sell as honeycomb or pure honey this year. Lynn is to speak to Rachel Doughty about covering her expenses in looking after the bees. It was acknowledged that she does a huge amount of work on behalf of the Friends of Cammo. There is a problem with a lack of flowers late in the season to support the bees and we will need to extend the flower availability.

7. Wild flowers

Esther asked whether the wildflowers we planted in the fields were flourishing and Nick confirmed they were doing very well. The cutting and baling of the fields will take place again as it has been such a success in maintaining the wildflowers and the biodiversity. The bales will be placed around the perimeter of the fields and not under the trees.

8. Other activities in the park

Woodchip spreading which absorbs the mud and stops compaction

Cutting back overgrown areas in the walled garden.

Logs continue to be brought in for wildlife habitat.

New No fire signs installed. There had been some problems with fires around the park but this seems to have abated.

Sheena McRobie said that on her own and others behalf she would like to thank Simon for all his hard work in spreading the woodchip and filling the holes in the ground around the park. Everyone agreed and Nick thanked Simon for this and all the other hard work he does for the Friends of Cammo.

9. Interpretation and Orientation

Simon reported that the orientation posts with arrows signposting the 3 waymarked trails are in place. Trails are available to purchase in paper form but are also available to be downloaded from the website. Harry mentioned the missing letters on one of the finger posts but Simon advised that these had recently been fixed. He reported also that the information panel in front of Cammo house had been moved a few yards to the left and the fingerpost at Cammo House relocated to a more suitable site on the other side of the path near the burnt tree.

10. David Kyles Report

Cammo Cottage, the Stables and the Walled Garden. The intention is for the walls to be consolidated to make them safe, enabling access to the ruins. A survey is going to be carried out by Atkins in liaison with the architects to work out the costs. Plans for the walled garden are to repair what they can, devegetate and where necessary fence off.

Cammo Lodge. The Lodge is still being used by the Forest Kindergarten as their new pods have no water, although they are now using North Gate as a pick up and drop off point. Lynn suggested that an outside tap could be added to the Lodge then the Kindergarten would not need to access the building, however the Edinburgh organisers for Forest Kindergartens would like to take over the Lodge and establish a head office/ training centre there. The Property Strategy group are dealing with it and if the Forest Kindergarten's request is approved this would leave the park without a visitor centre, and as Esther Davidson commented nowhere to display archaeological artefacts. Neither the Friends of Cammo nor the Cammo Estate Advisory Committee had been asked about the future of it and there has been no update from the council generally on members of the public using visitor centres following Covid restrictions.

Park Quality Assessment Report. This report shows a slight improvement in our standing, up to 78% from 77 % in 2019. A question was asked about what we could do to increase our standing further and it was felt that a proper visitor centre and safe buildings may improve it, as our lowest score was for buildings.

11. Archaeology Report from Esther Davidson

Work on the Dig at the Offices behind the Stable building and the Wright's Workshop has been completed. A Cattle Byre has been unearthed at the rear of the workshop. Work in the Walled Garden has also revealed the inner workings of the heated North wall of the garden which supported the Greenhouse (south facing). Excavation is currently ongoing on the area of the greenhouse adjacent to the heated wall, extending its full length. The live remnants of a vine have been found under the ivy, still clinging to its supports. Esther added that the work of the archaeologists was not just confined to digging but also researching the history and they had found a bill for the original snowdrops dated 1783.

To celebrate 50 years of EAFS, an Exhibition of work undertaken by the Society is to be presented at The Museum of Edinburgh on 1st October and through December until the first week in January. It will feature a section on the work at Cammo with a presentation of some of the finds. These are currently being sorted and collated for show.

In the Doors Open Day, 26th September, it is hoped to mount a 'walk and talk' about the History and Archaeology of the Cammo Estate.

12. Any Other Business

Planning – The City Plan 2030 is coming to the Council at the end of September and it is not yet known what will be in it. There was nothing in the preceding Choices document which directly affected us and the proposal to develop the area next to Cammo Walk between the two new developments was not on it. An Application has now been submitted to develop that area and the Liberal Democrats are spearheading a campaign to prevent this. Some of the members were aware of this proposal and others were not. Lynn had said she had offered to do a mail drop for the Liberal Democrats to raise awareness of this issue.

There had also been an application to widen Cammo Walk beyond the South Carpark up to Craigs Road to turn it into an active travel route. This should have been determined by June, but had been postponed and it may well now form part of the new application for development mentioned above.

The Leaf and Bean café have been given permission by the Council to operate from a trailer next to the Lodge. We do not know any details as to when, and concerns were raised about any resulting litter.

A question was raised as to whether there would be a social event in November, as last years planned event had to be cancelled. There were various comments about whether one could be held inside or out, perhaps something could be held at the Turnhouse Golf Club or whether there would be a return of the barbeques? Barbeques seemed unlikely and the general consensus seemed to be that we would wait and see what would be allowed following the easing of the lockdown restrictions.

There was comment made about the numbers of staff who used to look after Cammo estate, with reports that Velda Weir and Susan Dickson were both leaving. Nick said that if it wasn't for the work carried out by the Friends of Cammo the Parks department would struggle as the staff numbers had been so reduced.

Simon mentioned that apples from the walled garden orchard were available for the attendees.

Meeting closed