



Surrey Docks Farm Provident Society Limited

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Surrey Docks Farm Provident Society Limited is an Exempt Charity No: 22829R

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

held on 12 October 2023 at 7.00pm

Members in attendance:

Simon Hughes (Patron), Brett Bennett-Smith (MC), Matthew White (MC), Jolin Holme (MC), Alan Chadborn (MC), Rosemary Petronis (MC), Andrew Tipler (MC), Mary Budd (MC), Dominic Fox (MC), Cllr Kath Whittam, Marta Brebner, Rev Andrew Doyle, June Wong, John Wills, Michele Smith, Anthony O'Brien, Chris Clapham, Steve Cornish, Michael Becha, Jonnie Beverley, Anne Johnson, Ann Warren, Colin Boyle, Harriet Ellis-Elson, John Sarson.

Staff in attendance:

Gemma Hooper, Claire Elson, James Taylor, Pat Lipscombe, Jo Baden-Morgan, Kate McKinney, Siobhain Yates.

Youth Programme participants:

Charlie, Archie, Poppy, Sophie, Eve, Mariyah, David

Apologies were received from:

Anne Chadborn, Bishop Christopher Chessun, Cllr Jane Salmon, Werner Wiethage, Peter Newton, Sarah Allan, Hugh Watson, Sarah Becha, Daniel Becha, Annabel Stockman.

Documents circulated in advance of the meeting:

Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2023

Management Committee Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2023

1. Introduction

A quorum of members being present, Gemma Hooper welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Election of Chairperson

Brett Bennett-Smith was elected as Chairperson and agreed to chair the meeting.

3. Youth Programme

3.1 The Youth Programme includes a cohort of 65 Young Farmers and Greenagers aged 8-18 years old who attend every weekend.

3.2 Charlie, Archie, David, Poppy, Sophie and Eve from the Youth Committee and Youth Programme introduced themselves and highlighted some of their favourite activities over the last year, including a sheep drive, trips, fundraising and the awards they have won this year. They then took questions from the floor regarding:

- the huge mound that they have constructed;
- further details of the sheep drive across Southwark Bridge;
- how decisions are made by the Youth Committee;
- what they have learnt at the Farm that has been useful in their everyday life; and
- how much herbal dried tea they have sold.

4. Highlights of the Annual Report 2022-23

- 4.1 Brett Bennett-Smith presented highlights from the Society's Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2023.
- 4.2 The Farm has restored free access for visitors seven days a week.
- 4.3 The Farm's programme delivery has increased, engaging even more people.
- 4.4 The Farm gained a Green Flag Community Award, an international quality mark for parks and green spaces. The horticulture team won first place for their vegetable display at the London Harvest Festival.
- 4.5 The Farm was awarded London Youth's Gold Quality Mark this year, recognising the excellence of its youth programme. This is a fantastic achievement because the award is very difficult to achieve.
- 4.6 The Family Piglets Club, the Farm's weekly parents and toddlers club, has been re-established.
- 4.7 One of the Greenagers, Finn ran a successful event called "*Nature – What's the Point*". This engaged youth from the local community through many activities and Finn's hard work was recognised through an Environmental Award by the Jack Petchey Foundation.
- 4.8 The Farm featured on television, with Claire Elson (Livestock Manager) and Sarah Allan (Livestock volunteer) appearing on a dedicated episode of [The Farmers' Country Showdown](#) on BBC One.

4.9 The Farm's elderly donkeys, Alice and Hermione, left to live on a farm in Colchester. Two new donkeys have been taken on under the Donkey Sanctuaries Guardian Scheme.

5. Presentation of Financial Statements 2022-23

5.1 Jolin Holme presented an overview of the Farm's financial statements for the 2022/23 financial year.

5.2 Jolin explained that it had been a good year for the Farm. There was an underlying surplus of £9,522 before accounting adjustments, which is similar to last year's surplus (£7,321). After accounting treatments, including fixed asset depreciation and additions, there was an overall loss of £16,279. However, funders understand that this is an accounting loss, and it does not affect the Farm's ability to secure grants.

5.3 Debtors are under control, largely thanks to the efforts of Melisha Khyriem-Edwards (Finance Officer) chasing down payments. The Farm's cash balance of £127,345 was similar to the previous year (£128,465). The Farm's reserves of £155,492 are now very close to our target of four months' running costs (£158,000) based on a typical turnover of £475,000.

5.4 The Farm appointed a new auditor this year, Barnes Roffe. Jolin reported that the audit process had been smoother than in previous years and the auditor raised no concerns in relation to the Farm's financial position. The auditor did highlight some things for the Farm to address, the principal action being to put in place an underlease of the Forge by the end of March 2024.

5.5 Overall, the Farm is in a good and stable financial position. It is well run, with small surpluses being achieved year on year.

5.6 A question was asked regarding a Friends of the Farm scheme where regular donations are given by direct debit. Gemma said that it was felt that the effort involved to revamp this wouldn't be worth the amount that would be raised. However, this would be revisited once the Farm has recruited a new member of staff to provide administrative support.

5.7 Gemma reported that the Farm had received a few legacies in the past.

- 5.8 It was noted that people giving their time to the Farm is also very valuable and a question was asked whether this had been quantified (e.g. by calculating the value of that time equivalent to the amount that would be paid at the rate of the London Living Wage)? Jolin said that this would be considered in future and might be a useful metric to give to funders.
- 5.9 It was suggested that the Farm's Amazon Gift List should be publicised more widely. because this was a very successful way to obtain items needed by the Farm. In response to a further question, Gemma said that the Farm had previously looked at the "easyfundraising" platform, but that it was very difficult to use due to the Farm being regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority rather than the Charity Commission. The Provident Society is aiming to convert to charitable status once leases of the café and the forge have been put in place and further administrative support is available. The Farm was originally established as a Provident Society to allow it to trade, but trading is now permitted for Charitable Incorporated Organisations. Conversion proposals would be brought back to a Special General Meeting for a final decision.
- 5.10 Brett Bennett-Smith thanked Jolin, Gemma and Melisha for their considerable time spent ensuring that the Farm is in a positive and stable financial position.

6. Member Voting and Election of Management Committee

- 6.1 Brett Bennett-Smith presented the formal business of the annual general meeting for approval.
- 6.2 Three resolutions were put to a vote of the meeting:
- to receive the accounts and balance sheet of the Society for the year ended 31 March 2023, the annual report of the Management Committee and the independent auditor's report;
 - to reappoint Barnes Roffe as the Society's auditors; and
 - to re-elect Brett Bennett-Smith, Matthew White, Jolin Holme, Alan Chadborn, Rosemary Petronis, Mary Budd and Andrew Tipler as members of the Management Committee, and to elect Dominic Fox as a new member of the Management Committee.

6.3 The Chairperson declared that all three resolutions had been carried on a show of hands.

7. Highlights and Activities from 2023-24

7.1 Gemma Hooper presented the highlights and developments from the current year.

7.2 It had been another very busy six months on the Farm, which is continuing to deliver a full programme of activities. There has been a huge demand for school workshops with over 100 different primary schools being welcomed to the Farm each year. The Farm's own Youth Programme is also very active.

7.3 The Farm continues to deliver a range of training projects for adults with learning disabilities.

7.4 The Gardening for Wellbeing project has now been established as a core part of the Farm's programme, in partnership with Southwark Wellbeing Hub.

7.5 Over 70 dedicated volunteers support the farm shop, animal care, gardening, maintenance and the Farm's community programmes. The team's passion, teamwork and effort was shown in the Spring Fair (which raised more than £5,000) and the Harvest Festival (which took place on one of the hottest days of the year). Gemma expressed her enormous thanks to all of the Farm's staff, volunteers and participants.

7.6 The Farm continues to face some challenges. The increased cost of living has prompted renewed efforts to try to keep costs as low as possible in order to maximise accessibility to the Farm's programme of activities, which remain in very high demand. Animal feed costs increased significantly last year. This year, gas and electricity costs have doubled. Despite this, the Farm remains free of charge and is therefore a vital resource for the local community. Gemma thanked the Farm's funders for their support, in particular Southwark Council, whose common purpose grant was extended last year and provides just over £40,000 per annum to fund critical core posts at the Farm. The Farm is hoping to secure another extension this year.

7.7 Notwithstanding the challenges, there are also many positives to report. Workshops organised by the Youth Committee and Greenagers addressed air pollution. The Farm is now part of the Breathe London Network and a node will soon be installed at the Farm to measure air pollution. The node will feed live air quality data to a website (www.breathelondon.org).

- 7.8 In April, a fundraiser led by the Youth Committee was launched with the aim of getting ferrets back on the Farm and raised £1,750. Before Christmas, it is planned to upgrade the red shed to house new ferrets.
- 7.9 The Farm's new horsebox arrived in April. It is ULEZ-compliant and smaller than the previous horsebox so can be used to visit more schools, nurseries and community events. It can also be driven by existing staff therefore reducing costs. Gemma thanked the Mercers' Company, the Farmers' Company, Grange Farm Centre Trust and Bernard Sunley Foundation for providing funding towards the cost of the horsebox. The Farmers' Company continues to provide extensive support to the Farm, both financially and with networking opportunities.
- 7.10 Claire Elson added that the Farm's livestock had taken part in several events offsite, including the Lambeth Country Show at which the Farm was awarded many rosettes for their sheep and the London Harvest Festival where the livestock team came first in the animal show. This year's rosettes and trophies were on show at the AGM.
- 7.11 Gemma expressed her thanks to the Farm's funders, supporters, customers of the Farm Shop, those who donate to the Farm and everyone who has contributed to the success of the Farm over the last year.
- 7.12 Gemma also thanked the members of the Management Committee for their time and dedication.

8. Closing and Thanks

- 8.1 Brett Bennett-Smith thanked everyone who gives their time to the Farm and in particular wished to thank Gemma Hooper for her expert management of the Farm. Gemma is hugely impressive and devotes a great deal of time and effort to ensuring that the Farm is successful in all of the activities and events that it offers to the local community.

Meeting closed at 8.04pm