

Thornhill Square Association

Meeting 7:00 p.m. 27 November 2023

St Andrews Church Hall, Bridgeman Road, London N1 1BQ

1 Attendance

1.1 Present

Karen Bizon, Victoria Buhler, Michael Burcher, Rachel Everard, Barbara Firebrace, Patrick Firebrace, Marianne Fox, Robert Fox, Bennet Griffin, Julia Groves, Neil Harrison, Marie-Stella Kreppel, Anna McKane, Christopher McKane, Claire Milne, Robert Milne, Mel Myers, Praful Nargund, William Newton, Mary Nicholson, Shamus Rae, Pia Rainey, Nigel Rogers, Philip Rutnam, Barbara Segal, John Simons, Lindsey Simons, Toby Taper, Maureen Taylor, Caroline Titley, Robert Titley, Bill Tuck and Julian Williams.

1.2 Apologies

Stephanie Hartog and Roz Marston,

2 Previous meeting

2.1 Notes

The notes for the meeting of 28 November 2022 had been posted on the web site and were formally approved.

2.2 Matters arising

Nothing was discussed.

3 Operations

3.1 Election of the Committee

The following were appointed without objection:

- Chair: Anna McKane
- Secretary: Robert Milne
- Treasurer: Stephanie Hartog
- Event co-ordinator: Roz Marston

3.2 Use of funds

Anna McKane (on behalf of Stephanie Hartog) summarised the accounts for 2023. As at 27 November 2023 the main account held £2,119.15 (received occasionally for filming, mainly in Thornhill Crescent) and the gardening account held £1,539.26 (received regularly for maintaining two beds and supplemented by gifts from residents).

4 Activities

4.1 Gardening

Anna McKane mentioned how greatly Thornhill Square Garden had improved since volunteers had started to do the gardening (initially on just two beds, which remain the only two paid for by the Council). Thousands of bulbs had been planted, native hedgerows had been introduced, and chemical treatments had been avoided.

More help would be very welcome, especially as there are now nine large beds to look after without Council assistance and there is a need for succession planning.

Thornhill Crescent Garden, too, had become very much better in recent years, through the hard work of another team of volunteers.

4.2 Railings repair

Patrick Firebrace described the progress on arranging for the railings to be repaired. An application for listed building consent had been approved. An application for planning permission had been submitted; it had been needed because of the potential for harming the trees while repairing the railings.

The proposed work is to mend and redecorate the surviving railings. The intention is to replace broken cast iron bases by painted pre-cast concrete ones and to drop the new or mended uprights into holes in the bases in ways that avoided the trees.

Initially just the worst section of the railings, between the corner of Bridgeman Road and the gate on the east side of Thornhill Square Garden, would be repaired. The cost of doing that was estimated to be about £45,000; the cost of doing the complete job was estimated to be about £300,000. Patrick Firebrace and an expert survey company had reached rather similar conclusions to each other in their separate estimates.

Large fractions of the estimates are labour costs; these can be reduced considerably if volunteers (from the neighbourhood or from companies aiming to meet social responsibility targets) strip and repaint the ironwork. Because the existing paints contain lead, they will be removed by applying alkaline poultices.

Funding bodies might require works besides the repair of the railings, to improve the park in various other ways. They might also require matched funding, but, as Praful Nargund confirmed, the Council is unlikely to put repairing the railings high on its list of priorities.

At this point volunteers are needed, to find funding sources and prepare marketing and bidding materials. Everyone would be welcome, whatever their skills.

4.3 Church restoration

Philip Rutnam described the problems with the building. The north transept and the east end are suffering from subsidence, for reasons not yet known. The iron clamps in the tower need to be replaced by steel ones: they are corroding and forcing apart the stones, which themselves might be disintegrating. The netting around the tower has been replaced, surveys have been commissioned, and the Cloudesley Foundation has agreed to pay £65,000 for drainage and stonework, but this is a small fraction of the millions that will be needed.

The interior of the building also needs attention: the partitioning of the aisles deprives the nave of natural light, and the heating is inefficient. The building already hosts many activities on every day of the week, ranging from a Sudanese women's group to a rehearsing orchestra; the intention is that yet more will be hosted, with better facilities.

The project to restore the church will develop greatly over the coming year, with proper project management, detailed work specification and professional fund raising. The Church Commissioners will not pay for the restoration: they fund cathedrals and clerical pensions, but not parish churches. There will need to be appeals and bids for funding. Again, volunteers are required to help with this.

5 Any other business

Shamus Rae and Julia Groves asked about the survey of energy consumption by householders that was conducted in Thornhill Square, Thornhill Crescent and Huntingdon Street. The project aimed to consider how best to meet the future energy needs of terraced houses, especially where they were listed or in conservation areas. Robert Milne noted that the project resulted in a paper (which can be got by contacting tsa@antelope.org.uk) and a presentation to the Council for feeding into a strategy for improving the energy efficiency of such houses. As yet the Council has not developed this strategy: it aimed to appoint an officer for this purpose but diverted the necessary effort into supporting a bid for funding a small demonstrator project.

6 Actions

There will be further work to prepare cases for repairing the railings and restoring the church; people interested in taking part should contact tsa@antelope.org.uk so that they can be included. All are welcome, regardless of whether they attended this meeting.