

Friends of Stansfeld Public Meeting

7.30pm, 13 July 2015
Quarry Village Hall



1. Welcome and apologies

Richard Bradley (RB), elected Chair of the Friends of Stansfeld, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies had been received from: Anne Blackman, Jenny Elliott, John Glasson, Gillian Hood, Roger Jenkins, Nawaz Khan, Roz Simms, Marie Vickers, Leslie Williams.

2. Introduction and background

The meeting was reminded that the Stansfeld site is about 17 acres, and consists of around one acre of buildings plus woodland. It was purchased by the Rev Stansfeld around 1918 and sold to Birmingham City Council in 1933. It was used for educational purposes from 1918 until its closure in 2014; originally to provide a woodland experience for kids from St Ebbes in Oxford, and then for children from Birmingham, as well as children from local schools, scout and guide groups.

In 2014 Birmingham City Council announced plans to sell a 250 year lease for the site. A group within Friends of Quarry was established to monitor the situation, talk to bidders, and also enabled the land to be registered as an asset of community value by Rivington Parish Council. However, it was concluded that this group was too small and informal, and so on 4 June 2015, the Friends of Stansfeld was formed. The agreed aim was that the woodland area is protected in perpetuity (and opened up to the public if possible) and that the site provides educational facilities, especially a forest school. So far about 50 people have joined the Friends of Stansfeld and donated over £500.

Birmingham City Council required initial bids in June, and subsequently shortlisted three: Oxford Co-Housing; Oxford Trust also known as Science Oxford; and a care home.

It was noted that the Friends have contacted the Oxford Preservation Trust; that Birmingham City Council has asked for bids for the whole site but that the main bidder may wish to form a joint venture or sub contract woodland management; and that it is unknown what price Birmingham expects.

3. Progress since the last meeting

Since the last public meeting, a working committee has been established. RB introduced members of the committee present to the meeting, noting Roz Smith is Minutes Secretary and Phil Siswick is Treasurer. A woodland group has been set up which is looking at the site, meeting different organisations and working to understand how the woodland can be studied and managed. An education group is working to understand potential uses for the woodland. There is a communications group putting together a website.

4. Constitution

The working committee has been considering a constitution for the Friends, in particular as the Friends may need a formal structure and legal protection should there be an opportunity to work with one of the bidders. The working committee has agreed that it is preferable to apply for charitable status, which may make it easier to carry out fundraising activities, and would formalise our charitable aims. It is therefore proposed to establish the Friends of Stansfeld as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This means that the charity (not the trustees) is a separate legal entity. There is a model constitution available for CIOs.

The Committee has been through the constitution in detail. The constitution had been made available in advance of the meeting. RB highlighted various elements to the meeting.

Under the constitution, the charity is permitted to undertake any activity consistent with its aims, e.g. employ people, own land. Agreeing the aims of the charity is important to get right. Under charity law, there are 13 reasons to be a charity, and the aims of the Friends need to align with these. The proposed aims are:

1. To advance the education of children and young people by providing, or by raising awareness so that others provide, a woodland educational facility such as a Forest School within the Stansfeld site.
2. For the benefit of the public, to conserve, protect and improve the natural environment of the current woodland area within the Stansfeld site by means of raising awareness, seeking partners, or by fundraising to procure and/or manage the site.

It is also necessary to state who the beneficiaries of the charity are. There has been some debate about this by the working committee, but it was concluded that it would be most appropriate to specify the people of Oxford East as the main (although not the only) beneficiaries.

The meeting suggested that the word “enjoy” be incorporated into aim 1, and that the word “outdoor” be added to aim 2 to clarify that the forest school is not primarily based in a building. It was noted that objective 1 covers educational purposes for children and young people, but that the benefit of people of all ages is covered in aim 2. The committee will consider these suggestions.

There are two type of people involved in the CIO: the trustees who are responsible for the charity, and the members. Under the constitution, members have no liability. Membership is open to anyone who agrees with the aims of the charity. Members have a duty to exercise their power in good faith to fulfil the aims of the CIO. The CIO can charge members a fee. It was noted that at present, there is no fee, but a donation is requested. Members are invited to an Annual General Meeting at which they receive an annual report and the accounts. They also vote on the trustees. It was noted that the membership can propose and vote on a resolution.

The trustees are legally responsible for the working of the charity, undertake reporting activities and set the objectives. There are eight volunteers so far, although others are welcome. It was noted that it is necessary to agree an initial group of trustees, but these can invite others to join them up to the maximum of 12. It was noted that there are unlikely to be many meetings, as the

majority of the work is carried out by the working committee. It was queried whether councilors would have a conflict of interest. This is to be checked.

It was agreed that the working committee will amend the constitution to take into account the points discussed, and post it on the Friends of Quarry website for seven days for further comment. If there are no objections, it will be submitted to the Charity Commission. This was proposed by Chris Dorey and seconded by Roz Smith.

The list of trustees was also discussed. The proposed trustees are:

Richard Bradley
Katherine Gardiner
John Glasson
Chewe Munkonge
Pat O'Shea
Phil Siswick
Annabelle Skerritt
Roz Smith

During the meeting Gemma O'Connor expressed interest in becoming a trustee but has since withdrawn. The list of trustees was agreed. This was proposed by Chris Dorey and seconded by Roz Smith.

On a practical point, it was explained that the internet will be used as the primary form of communication with members. Providing an email address is taken as permission to use this as the primary form of contact. Anyone without internet access should let the committee know and alternative arrangements will be made. It was also noted that the bank account is not yet set up, but donations received to date are being held in the Friends of Quarry account.

5. Discussion about the bids

It was noted that the purpose of the discussion was not to compare bids or decide if they were supported, but to understand more about the two bidders represented at the meeting. The third bidder wishes to remain anonymous.

Oxford Cohousing

The bid proposes mixed housing (owned and rented) for a mixed group of people. It is anticipated that there will be as many permanent affordable homes as can be accommodated within the bid, and that homes will be made available to those in housing need. The design of the homes is based on Scandinavian housing units. It is intended that they have low impact, and that there are shared facilities, such as guest rooms and gardens. There will also be a shared common house, big enough to hold meetings and it is hoped that this would be available to the local community. It was not clear how many units were planned for the site, nor how many people would live there, but it is likely to be a minimum of 20 homes. Oxford Cohousing has not finalised plans for how much of the site will be built on, and this would need to be informed by discussion with Oxford City Council.

Oxford Cohousing has regular meetings and anyone is welcome to join - the group is currently looking for members. Anyone can become an associate member, but to join the community there is an application process. The group includes young singles, families and older people. Members of Oxford Co-housing agree to various principles such as limited use of cars.

Oxford Cohousing wants to maintain and enhance the biodiversity, allow forest schools to operate and continue outdoor education activities. However, it still needs to discuss this with the Friends of Stansfeld. Oxford Cohousing is open to there being public access to the site, but consider that Friends of Stansfeld need to take a lead on this, and it is unlikely that access would be completely unrestricted given the desire to protect the environment and biodiversity.

Oxford Cohousing's objective is to be a friendly neighbourhood that will integrate into the local community. There is no religious affiliation, but the community is motivated by sustainability.

Oxford Trust

The Oxford Trust is thirty years old. Its aim is to support science and innovation. It works in three key areas:

- Supporting innovation.
- Public engagement (e.g. through workshops for children and other events).
- Education (it is the largest provider of STEM support to schools in Oxfordshire and has good links with most of the primary and secondary schools in the area).

The Oxford Trust was set up by Sir Martin and Lady Audrey Wood, major Oxford philanthropists. Associated with the Oxford Trust are a number of charities, including the Earth Trust that works at Little Wittenham, and the Silver Foundation that promotes wood skills.

Plans for Stansfeld include a proposal to build an innovation centre for start up companies, and a science centre (like the recently closed one on St Clement's) providing hands on sciences for primary schools and families. The Oxford Trust hopes to work with the Friends of Stansfeld to involve the community. For example, it hopes to include a cafe on the site, open to the community (e.g. toddler groups). It envisages access to the woodland being on a managed basis to protect the ecology, with the view that it would be suitable to open it to the community but not to day trippers. The Oxford Trust has also included plans for about 10 keyworker flats in the initial bid, aimed at technicians supporting infrastructure behind science and innovation.

The Oxford Trust intends to work with its partner, the Earth Trust, to manage the woodland, which would be made available to forest schools.

Questions were raised about the access to the site. The Oxford Trust has had a traffic survey done but has not yet received the results. However, it hopes to manage traffic, for example by running a minibus from Thornhill Park and Ride, and by running an electric bike scheme between Stansfeld and the centre of Oxford - there are various ideas but they all still need consideration.

6. Any other business

There was none. The meeting closed at 8.55pm.