

**Friends of Marple Memorial Park  
Annual General Meeting: Thursday 11 April 2024  
Marple Library**

**Present:** Mick Thompson, Lorraine Thompson, Joyce Reed, Diane Jackson, Malcolm Allan, Micaela Wood, Mark Whittaker, Michaela Miekle, Cllr Geoff Abell.

**1.0 Apologies:** Bob Wilson, Terry Wood, Patrick O'Herlihy, Helen Wiles, Phil Wiles.

**1.1 Minutes of Meeting 14 March 2024:** Agreed.

**2.0 Annual General Meeting covering 2022 - 2023**

The last AGM held on Thursday 13 October 2022 covered the group's two financial years of January 2020 to December 2021. The financial years covered by this meeting are January to December 2022 and January to December 2023.

**2.1 Chairman's Report presented by Mark Whittaker**

**Summary of highlights and lowlights since the previous AGM**

As well as the successes and achievements we will talk about in this report, 2021 / 2022 will be remembered as a time of extreme antisocial behaviour in the park. It seemed that after Covid-19 lockdowns some people went a bit crazy when let out. Our park suffered significantly. Lowlights include most of the windows in Hollins House being smashed, arson causing damage to the skatepark and tarmac paths and even abuse and assaults on TLC staff and members of the public.

Our attempts to re-engage with police and council over these issues had very mixed results. Our relationship with GMP developed well, with particular thanks to PC Mayers who has since left the force. However, our relationship with the council over CCTV became a serious bone of contention and is a big part of why I am stepping down.

Throughout the last three years we've tried to get the council to treat us as key stakeholders in the park on the Community Hub scheme. We particularly wanted to discuss ideas about using the Station Road area of the park with them in March 2021.

Unfortunately we were resisted at every step of the way from then until the wider engagement in September 2023. At first we thought matters were set to improve after the public engagement last year, and especially following a couple of meetings with them in October. Sadly the shutters came down again and we have not been treated in the way we feel we deserve after more than 20 years of caring for the park.

This has been the most significant council related issue in my decision to step down.

We did make extensive comments during the consultation last year and were pleased to learn at the presentation in February that the majority of our suggestions have been incorporated. The scheme is now significantly better than it was for our input.

Following presentation of the new layout in February we submitted further comments along with feedback on the engagement with us. The most significant comment is to be ambitious on the size and scale of the play park. We hope they listen.

Before moving to more positive things, 2022 was also the year when a neighbour came into our park to vandalise a tree near the canal much loved by young children. We've since created informal log seating near the centre of the park that we hope give young people an area where they can gather without conflicting with neighbours.

I must mention the fantastic help from Drew Collett of Shelby Landscapes to move the oak logs from Brabyns Park to Memorial Park, and to David Myers for donating them.

2022 was the 100th anniversary of the park's creation and we were pleased to help the community commemorate this in a variety of ways:

- We commissioned Art Stop CIC to create commemorative artwork panels under the canopy of the former Bowling Pavilion. This features photographic images from the park's dedication in July 1922 and made a fitting tribute.
- We organised a Marple School Gardens Project, where two local schools designed and built gardens in the park to commemorate its centenary. Special thanks is due to local resident Sarah Braide for her ideas and support with this. We have since relocated the schools' artwork to the end of the Bowlers' Hut.
- Marple Local History Society responded to our request to get involved by putting on an excellent exhibition in the library about the park's history.
- We held a 100th Birthday Treasure Hunt in the park on the anniversary of the Dedication Day. This was a fantastic success with huge community support.
- The Brass Bands of Marple helped us to celebrate too, with an excellent concert on the Sunday. Sadly the weather didn't allow it to be in the park as planned.
- We published a commemorative booklet featuring the programme of and the photographs from the park's Dedication in 1922. This raised £443 for the park.
- Volunteer Anne Frazer created a fabulous video to record what we did during the park's centenary year, and also an updated "What We Do" one.

We worked with local Artist Helen Middleton to facilitate and fund art workshops at the skatepark, resulting in the children's artwork being added to the top ramps.

We followed advice from Youth Worker Earl Nanton to create a sign at the skatepark explaining how we led the project, as the latest generation of users were unaware.

We pressed for repair of the jump-box at the skatepark before it became dangerous and succeeded in getting the council to agree and fund a full replacement.

We pressed for something to be done about the new MUGA tarmac under warranty as it was holding water during heavy rain. After drilling the tarmac failed the council arranged for additional drainage to be installed and the situation is much improved.

We pressed and pressed for action on the drainage causing the manhole near the woodland to regularly leak sewage into the park. With the help of Councillor Senior we were finally able to overcome confusion between the council and UU over who was responsible (UU) and get what turned out to be a relatively simple repair completed.

We facilitated between donors and the council to arrange purchase and installation of four new commemorative benches in the park. We had intended to do at least 8 more but the council officer dealing with it was so obstructive and difficult to deal with that we refused to facilitate any more after the wrong benches were installed. The officer tried to claim that they were as we specified but after we sent extensive documentary evidence that our specification had not been followed we've had no response. This is another significant factor in my decision to wind-down my involvement in the park.

We sprung into detective mode when a Property Services' contractor trashed the flowerbed behind the toilet block, while supposedly clearing the gutters. The council denied their contractor was responsible but owned up after we proved it thanks to TLC operatives who had witnessed the act. Replacement plants were provided!

We took back responsibility for the allotment beds from Marple Allotment Association after 10 years and completed a project to refurbish them and add new raised beds.

Materials were recycled from the School Gardens Project and funded by Stockport Hydro. The first season was very successful but ideally we now need a small special interest group of volunteers to take ownership of growing fruit and veg in the beds.

The hardstandings we created under the Infants Play Area picnic benches with the help of AstraZeneca turned into a bit of a disaster. The material used never compacted in the way we expected and the loose chippings were a problem. We worked hard with council officers to identify the best possible solution and with the financial help of Marple Area Committee we were able to replace them with rubber mulch.

After the poor results from our first attempt to create a wildflower meadow in the park we decided to dig in and experiment on a smaller scale. When the Scouts gave up their bed in the park we used this to create an experimental wildflower strip that was much more successful. Ideally we need interested volunteers to continue this work.

The park received a Friends in Trust award as one of the UK's Favourite Parks in the Northwest. We were nominated by a local resident and voted for by the community.

We were pleased to welcome the Coffee Bean Dream to the park in May 2022. Sarah and her team were an incredibly positive addition but sadly we've had to say goodbye recently, as the council's fees made it unsustainable for her. Over winter 2022/2023 we lobbied hard for the fees to be waived until spring and were very disappointed at the council's total intransigence in this matter. We wish Sarah well.

After learning that our park had been put forward as the location for Marple North in a borough-wide scheme to create a COVID19 memorial in each ward, we developed and campaigned for a long-lasting maintenance-free scheme, rather than a flowerbed. We successfully steered this into a project to replace the condemned "Green Flag" flagpole in the park and add a commemorative memorial in front of it. This was supported by Marple Mutual Aid, a group formed during the pandemic, with a contribution of £400.

Linked to this, we were also able to get the War Memorial flag pole maintained.

Although we initially received a great deal of resistance to talk to us about it, we eventually managed to engage with the council and TLC over the use of weed-killer in the park. We were able to get them to agree not to use it around lampposts, bins, benches and other fixtures and fitting and we would trim / keep these tidy. This has been very successful but it does mean we need to keep on top of that task.

We also trialled leaving several extra areas of the park as long grass throughout 2023 but this was less successful and we have reverted to as it was (there were always large areas of long grass left around the canal woodland walk and these will remain).

We were hugely successful with our fund-raising for Outdoor Exercise Equipment and we spent a lot of time and effort researching other installations throughout Greater Manchester to inform our equipment selection. A big thank you to Mike Whittaker for his help on this. We also engaged and consulted with the community before making our final choices. As we all know now, the installation of the equipment has been a nightmare and there were major cock-ups by the council's contractor. There are still some issues to resolve before we make our contribution towards the installation cost.

I must now mention the completely unjustified final demand and threat of court action from the council over payment for the equipment supply. The stress and frustration caused by this is yet another significant factor in my decision to step-down.

Returning to the positive, volunteer Terry Wood made a marvellous job of refurbishing the stocks for us in 2023. The last time we did this was with Tony Heginbotham in 2004 but the slats made of hardwood by Terry this time should see us all out.

At Joyce's suggestion we ran Little Growers later in 2023 using wallflowers and this

was much better than doing it in the cold, wet months of March - April. If volunteers are available it would be good to continue this engagement with young families.

After months haranguing councillors and Conservation Officer Paul Hartley we were eventually able to get inappropriate fire doors installed on Hollins House by Property Services replaced with ones in keeping with the old French Doors that used to be at this location. It's a worry how cavalier the council were with their own listed building.

We were pleased when Marple Civic Society engaged with us on their idea for an accessible woodland near to the cinema and were happy to support this with some provisos. We strongly recommended this scheme be supported by the Community Hub project as a location for replacement trees and this appears to have been successful. The society recently met with the council on this and although we declined to attend they have said they will continue to treat it as a joint project with Friends of the Park.

A resident approached us about the wear around the 5-a-side goals we installed in the park a few years ago. Initially we thought about moving them to fresh ground but after speaking to the council we have decided to install new moveable goalposts with two sets of sockets. This will allow the position to be changed easily and allow the ground to recover. The goals have been delivered and should be installed soon.

Another resident approached us about fitting basketball nets to the hoops at the skatepark MUGA. We followed this up and the council kindly replaced the hoops with the type that has hooks for nets. We have spare nets and hope to be able to continue replacing these as and when needed. The recent set have lasted much longer.

We've continued to store and install / remove the Nativity Sculptures on Market Street at Christmas. I hope the group can continue to do this and will be happy to help.

In 2022 we held 14 official Task Days, clocking up 698 volunteer hours, and in 2023 18 Task Days with 946 hours of volunteer time logged. I've calculated that during 20 years we've contributed over 35,000 volunteer hours towards the upkeep of the park.

We purchased a new gazebo with help from Marple Area Committee and attended Marple Carnival – leading the parade in 2022 – we also attended Marple Food and Drink Festivals and several Makers Markets to engage with the public and raise funds.

We've achieved a fantastic level of fund-raising with our Treasure Hunts and our Handcrafted Christmas Fairs. I'd like to say thank you to everyone who has helped, with a special mention for Diane Jackson, who has worked so hard on them both.

I'd also like to say thank you to Diane for the funds raised by her handcrafted jewellery, and to Gill for her handmade cards. It's incredible how much they've raised.

Our 50-50 Club has been another great fund-raising success since we set it up in 2019. It's provided much of our funding for the exercise equipment and several other recent projects. Another great idea from Diane, well implemented. We will talk more later about the closure but I can confirm it has raised £13,730 for the park.

I can also confirm that it is to morph into a new 50-50 Club run by Kevin Murray and Marple Carnival for the benefit of the whole Marple Community, a great legacy. Kevin has indicated that Friends of the Park will be supported along with other groups.

We were delighted that the group was recognised as "Volunteer Team of the Year" in the 2022 Proud of Marple Awards organised by the Marple Review newspaper.

Before we start the Treasurer's Report, I'd like to highlight that since the group began in 2003 we've raised over £172,034 of funding via our own accounts and encouraged a further £315,388 of investment in the park. A grand total of £487,422.

## **2.2 Treasurer's Report for 2022 and 2023**

Although Diane is the current Treasurer, Mark was Treasurer until October 2022. As he is now stepping-down they agreed in advance that he would present the report.

The McInnes Partnership audited our accounts for the calendar years of 2022 and 2023 and separate certified income and expenditure sheets were produced at the end of each year. Both sheets were issued with the agenda to this meeting.

The McInnes Partnership has now provided this service free of charge for 20 years.

### **Income 2022 / 2023**

Income in 2022 was £14,975 and in 2023 it was £15,635, taking the total raised via our own accounts since the group began to £170,396 at the end of 2023.

#### **Highlights in 2022 were:**

£3,700 from the Centenary Treasure Hunt; £3,097 from the 50-50 Club; £1,550 awarded by the Stockport CAN Fund (electric power tools); £1,119 Local Giving donations; £905 Christmas Craft Sale; £556 from card sales; £500 Local Giving Magic Little Grant; £500 Land and Water Service donation; £500 from Stockport Hydro; £444 collected in the park; £443 Dedication Booklet Sales; £398 granted by Marple Area Committee (gazebo); £250 Marple Beer Run; £180 from Marple Bands; £141 from B'Dazzled Jewellery sales; £128 from The Marple Website; donations of £100 each from The Coffee Bean Dream, Trevor Williams, Chris Hague and Forever Manchester Connecting Communities; plus several smaller donations and contributions under £100, totalling £163.

#### **Highlights in 2023 were:**

£3,432 from the Treasure Hunt; £3,138 from the 50-50 Club; £1,500 awarded by the Macnair Trust; £1,000 granted by Marple Area Committee; £1,000 donated by Marple Hall School; £956 Local Giving donations; £954 Christmas Craft Sale; £500 Stockport Hydro; £450 donation from Marple Stationery Supplies calendar, £420 from card sales; £400 from Marple Mutual Aid; £250 collected in the park; £250 Marple Beer Run donation; £249 from the MacFall family; £232 from collection boxes, £180 from B'Dazzled Jewellery sales; £180 from Marple Bands; £100 from Marple Carnival; £100 from the Carver Theatre; £100 from Chris Hague and several smaller donations and contributions under £100, totalling £241.

Donations via Local Giving over the two years have been significant with a net income of £2,075. This includes £1,640 in donations, £549 Gift-Aid, less £114 transaction fees. In addition, we've had another £500 Magic Little Grant that we would otherwise not be eligible for. So the annual fee, although increased to £180, remains good value.

### **Expenditure 2022 / 2023**

In 2022 we spent £12,080 and in 2023 £22,165 (a total of £34,245 over the two years), taking our total direct spending on the park since 2003 to £153,683.

#### **Our outgoings in 2022 were:**

- £4,169 on the Pavilion Art Project.
- £1,775 contribution to new Springers in Infants Play Area.
- £1,585 on Battery Power Tools.
- £1,123 on School Gardens Project.
- £750 on purchase of One Stockport Frog.
- £513 on new gazebo.

- £510 on tools and materials.
- £500 on Skatepark Art Project.
- £500 contribution to Infants Play Area fence repairs.
- £286 Treasure Hunt costs.
- £161 on Public Liability insurance.
- £96 on the Local Giving fee.
- £62 on plants and seeds.
- £50 on our Poppy Wreath.

#### **Our outgoings in 2023 were:**

- £19,809 on Outdoor Exercise Equipment supply.
- £556 on building the Allotment Beds.
- £437 on tools and materials.
- £247 on refurbishment of the Stocks.
- £180 on the Local Giving fee.
- £163 on Public Liability insurance.
- £149 on the MacFall bench plaque.
- £148 on the Skatepark sign.
- £143 on Treasure Hunt costs.
- £125 on plants and seeds.
- £108 on hi-vis vests.
- £100 on our Poppy Wreath.

#### **2023 Year End Status**

At the end of 2023 we had a bank balance of £17,347 in the main Barclays account and £770 in the 50-50 Club account, with a total of £9,620 committed to various specific projects. These were: £8,620 Outdoor Exercise Equipment, £400 to the Covid Memorial, £400 to the Skatepark (donated by MHS) and £200 to Flagpole repairs.

Unallocated funds (our working balance) at the year end was £7,727.

#### **Current financial position:**

##### **Income since last meeting:**

- £160.00 50-50 Club donated subscriptions.
- £52.11 Local Giving.
- £225.00 50-50 Club March Draw *[PMN: plus £45 donated by 3<sup>rd</sup> prize winner]*

##### **Expenditure since last meeting:**

- £34.00 Tools & Materials (Key cutting).

**Current balance: £18,291.92**

**Committed future spends: £10,003.96**

- £8,619.96 Exercise Equipment installation.
- £400 ring-fenced for Skatepark.
- £984.00 New moveable goalposts.

**Unallocated working balance: £8,287.96**

## **2.3 Election of Officials**

### **2.3.1 Chairman**

Mark is now stepping-down as Chairman. Mick thanked him and Gill on behalf of the group for their many years of dedicated leadership, followed by a round of applause. It was agreed that recognition of their efforts would be arranged at a suitable time.

Malcolm Allan was nominated as new Chairman by Mick, seconded by Diane and being the only candidate was elected unanimously by all those present.

Malcolm took the chair and also thanked Mark and Gill, adding that they are irreplaceable but there is a group of willing volunteers happy to share out some of the many things that they have done. They are determined to keep things going as best they can and protect Mark and Gill's wonderful legacy for Marple.

Mark will remain as a committee member and banking signatory for as long as necessary to support and hand-over banking and admin to Malcolm and Diane.

### **2.3.2 Treasurer**

Diane Jackson is the current Treasurer and is happy to continue and pickup much of the group's administration. Diane was nominated by Malcolm, seconded by Mick and being the only candidate was elected unanimously by all those present.

Mark will give support to Diane for as long as necessary.

### **2.3.3 Secretary**

The role of Secretary is vacant. Mick Thompson was co-opted to this role by Malcolm and all others present on the understanding that his workload would be minimal.

Mick is a designated signatory on the bank accounts from his time as Chairman.

### **2.3.4 Social Secretary**

It was agreed by all that Micaela Wood will continue as Social Secretary.

### **2.3.5 Committee**

In accordance with the requirements of the constitution, the following will undertake the role of committee members (the constitution requires 5 minimum):

- Malcolm Allan.
- Diane Jackson.
- Mick Thompson.
- Patrick O'Herlihy (has confirmed by email that he would like to continue).
- Lorraine Thompson.
- Joyce Reed.
- Bob Wilson.
- Micaela Wood.
- Terry Wood (to be confirmed with Terry).
- Mark Whittaker (until everything fully handed over).

### **2.3.6 Constitutional changes**

It was agreed the constitution is flexible enough and does not need to change.

**With the election of officials and other constitutional matters completed the AGM was declared closed and the meeting continued with normal business.**

### 3.0 Matters Arising:

#### 3.1 Ongoing Projects

Mark has agreed to see two ongoing projects to completion on behalf of the group:

##### Outdoor Exercise Equipment

The resin bonded gravel surface has been applied to the City Bike and Magnetic Bells. The council has agreed to apply the same finish to the tarmac at the Combi-5 unit for consistency and all three locations will need the loose gravel sweeping off.

The shock absorbers have been delivered to Massey and Harris by Kompan and the new buffers can now be fabricated and fitted. Minor snags (paint touch-up / miss-threaded bolt) by Playground Maintenance remain outstanding at present.

We will be happy to receive the invoice for our £8,619.96 contribution to the installation costs once the above items are completed by the council's contractors.

##### New moveable goalposts

The goalposts are now delivered, payment will be on successful installation.

Mark needs to meet with Richard Booker to agree locations and has passed-on details of his availability. Malcolm has been copied in and will attend too if he can.

Our contribution will be £984 for supply only, the council are covering install costs.

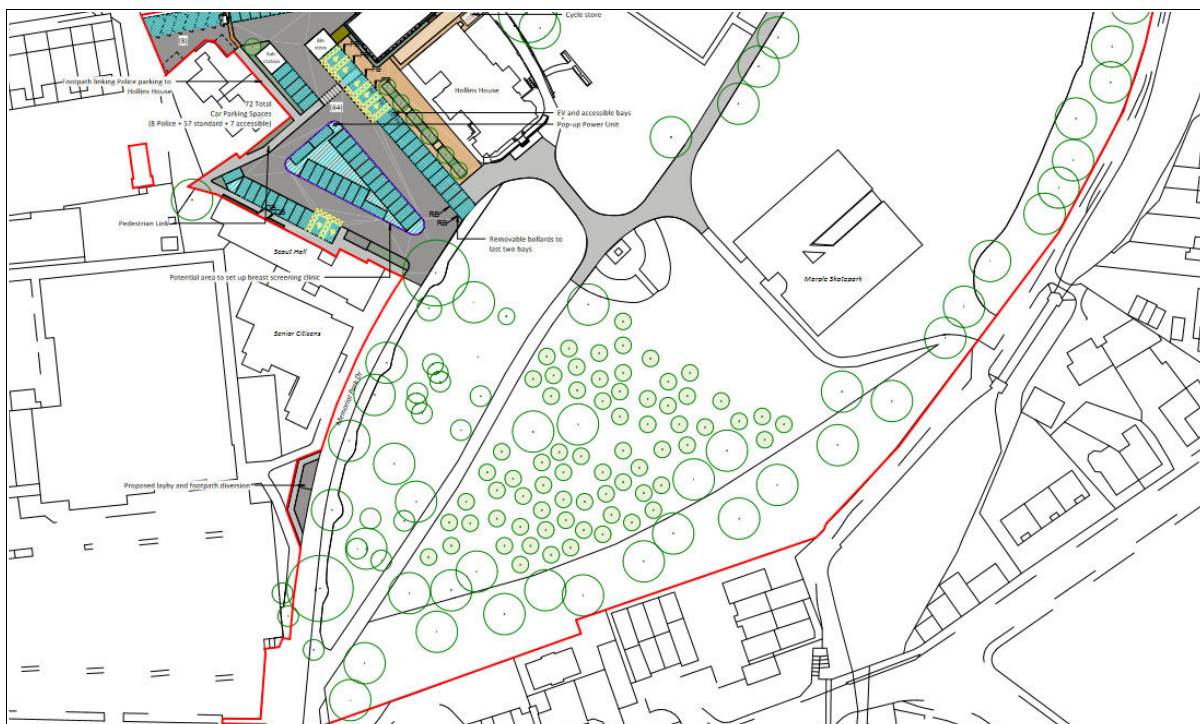
#### 3.2 Community Hub

The planning application DC/091420 was submitted on 11 March 2024.

There are 108 documents in the application and Mark has reviewed some of them:

The Heritage Study doesn't identify the former Bowling Pavilion built by soldiers returning from WWI in memory of their comrades who fell as a Heritage Asset. This is bewildering, especially after the number of times we've highlighted it to the council.

Mark is gobsmacked at the extend of tree-planting shown on the new layout, covering the park all the way from the cinema boundary to the war memorial. It is not at all representative of the Marple Civic Society scheme as we understood it.





Mark will step-back from this matter and will no longer engage with the council.

Malcolm is in agreement with these concerns and will take them forward.

It was felt the group should review and comment on the application and it was agreed to form a small sub-group of Malcolm, Mick and Lorraine to review the planning application documents on behalf of the group, possibly using the library copies.

### **3.3 Task Days**

Malcolm advised it has been decided in the short-term to stick with the scheduled task days of the last Saturday each month and another two weeks back from that. He will lead the next task day on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April and Mick and Larry will do 27<sup>th</sup> April.

Malcolm is working on a rota of trained task leaders to hopefully cover all of these until the end of June and will continue talking to others who are happy to lead.

Mick, Helen and Phil are attending task leader training on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April. Larry can no longer go and Malcolm will sound out other volunteers on Saturday to see if there is anyone who would like to take-up the free space. Note that Larry is already trained but she and Mick were planning to use the course as a refresher.

Bernard has indicated to Malcolm that he would like to continue leading on the Band Room garden, subject to his circumstances. It was suggested that an extra set of keys for the main store should be cut for Bernard so that he can access the power tools.

The group's risk assessments are stored on our Dropbox shared drive. These will need to be reviewed and updated ready for a task day application covering 1<sup>st</sup> July to 31<sup>st</sup> December. The current application runs until 30 June and the new one should be submitted 4 to 6 weeks in advance for approval. Mark will lead Diane through the application process but the risk assessments will need to be review, updated and signed-off by one or more of the trained task leaders.

Mark has shared details of how to apply for free parking for up to 6 vehicles with Diane and Malcolm. This is separate to but can be done alongside the task days.

The group hadn't realised that Gill has always paid for refreshments and thanked her for that. It was agreed that going forward this should be paid from funds collected in the park rather than by individuals and a petty cash system will be set-up.

Joyce and Larry will take the lead on deciding what gardening maintenance is needed on task days. Gill will be happy to chat about this to anyone who has questions.

Malcolm will contact someone he knows at the Allotment Association about seeking volunteers to look after the allotment beds, or at least for advice.

### **4.0 Financial Matters**

#### **Status of funds**

Current status of funds was covered under the Treasurer's Report.

#### **Closure of the 50-50 Club**

This appears to have gone well so far but the true test will be from 15<sup>th</sup> April when most SO payments are usually received. Hopefully most will have cancelled and there will not be too many to resolve. We can "take stock" at the end of April 2024.

The last draw was done with Kevin Murray on 5<sup>th</sup> April and all money is paid out.

Many subscribers are signing-up to the new Carnival 50-50 Club, giving a great legacy to the hard work and learning from running ours. Kevin advises that Friends of the Park will be considered as a priority if they need funds in the future.

One person has paid their SO in April so far, so the account has a balance of £5. Mark

has emailed them but no response. Di knows him and will phone to follow-up.  
One person has said he will continue to donate, which can be reconciled next month.

## **Banking changes**

### **Barclays account**

**Current officers:** Mark, Diane, Mick, Micaela.

The general strategy is to keep this account until outstanding projects are paid out and officers have been changed on the Santander account, then to close it down.

### **Santander account**

**Current officers:** Mark, Mick, Micaela.

After the 50-50 Club close-out is complete and reconciled the plan is to submit a change of officers to Malcolm, Diane and Mick. Once this is completed the balance from the Barclays account can be transferred and this will become the sole account.

## **AOB**

Mark has reduced the accounting files to two lever-arch files covering the last 6 years. These are now ready to hand-over to Diane along with unbanked cash. Mark agreed to accompany Diane to the Post Office to take her through the paying in process.

Malcolm has the collection bucket from the last task day containing around £20.

## **5.0 Any Other Business**

### **5.1 French Boules Court refurbishment**

It was agreed to leave this project on hold for the time-being and see how much the court is used this year and how it fares.

### **5.2 Scouts Plant Sale**

Joyce and Larry will review what is available and what is required. They would certainly like to add some colour to the circular bed.

Malcolm will order the plants on behalf of the group (Mark explained how he would normally pay for purchases like this with his own card and then reclaim it with receipts via the expenses form in the accounting spreadsheet).

### **5.3 Treasure Hunt**

The group wishes to continue the Treasure Hunts but without the intensive fund-raising element and just as an event for families. It was provisionally agreed to aim for either 25<sup>th</sup> May or 29<sup>th</sup> June this year and details will be discussed separately.

Mark has the Treasure Chest and some chocolates to hand over to Diane.

There are two gazebos with sides in the store (1 new 3m x 3m + 1 old 2m x 2m) and also 3 pop up tables, 1 donated by Mark and two originally owned by Terry.

### **5.4 Tombola**

Mark has Terry's tombola drum at home and is happy to hand it back or to pass to Malcolm to keep in the park store. Micaela will ask Terry what he wants to do.

## **6.0 Next Meeting:** 6pm Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2024 in Marple Library.

*[Post Meeting Note: the Library is currently also booked at 6pm on Thursdays 13<sup>th</sup> June and 11<sup>th</sup> July 2024. Further bookings will need to be made subject to the library closure, which is unknown at present.]*