

# The Friends of Rowntree Park AGM

Thurs 21st of October 7pm-8.45pm

## Attended:

Trustees: Cath Mortimer (chair), Rachael Bevan (Vice Chair), Anthony Chester (Treasurer), Matt Segar

Committee: Abigail Gaines (Charity Manager), Rosemary Bentley, Val Punchard, Christine Banham (joined 7.50pm)

CYC - Dave Meigh

Also joined by members of the FRP/Volunteers

S Light, M Spreckley, H Bentley, M Alexander, A Alexander, M Grant, H Dawes, A Waller, M Harmer

*Apologies from trustees/committee - Stephen Dunthorne, Louise Miller, Vikki O'Brien, Stu Small, Rebecca Dodgson, Ruth Philips. Ellie Lewis, Natalie Taylor,*

## 1. Welcome and very brief intro (main committee/trustees)

Introductions of trustees (6 new trustees joined the board in May 2021 and 2 of these were present at the meeting). We have 8 trustees whose role it is to 'oversee' the work of the charity. Formal responsibilities:

- Setting the overall strategic direction of the charity
- Making sure that the charity is well run and meeting its objectives/aims.
- Also making sure the charity is in good standing financially and is accountable to those who fund it
- Ensuring compliance with the law

All trustees have a link role with areas the committee focuses on. For example, Matt is linked with gardening and Rachael with Education/MHWP.

We also have a committee which are 'elected' members who opt to lead on specific areas. Those present at that time included:

Rosemary Bentley - Lead on Sensory garden and Craft group

Christine Banham - Children's activities joined later.

As of 2021 we also have a Charity Manager (Abigail Gaines) who was previously on the committee and was a trustee. More info on this [here](#).

## 2. Minutes of last AGM

Nothing to report.

## 3. Chairs Report

You can see the full Chair's Report [here](#). It was difficult to summarise all that the FRP has done in 2020-21 into this summary, but it provides a brief overview.

It was noted that the role and responsibilities of the group has changed greatly in the last few years. We became a charity in 2019 and have trialled having 'paid' staff in the form of a charity manager through 2021. It was felt that the overseeing and coordination of the charity needed dedicated focus. The role of the charity manager can be found here. Our Forest School leader (Christine) is now also a freelancer and is now paid through the charity - the events also raise money for the charity. The direction is also going toward paying for some gardening coordination for the FRP areas as the lead has to plan, oversee, control budget, order and coordinate with volunteers and plan sessions, and maintain tools. It may be that further roles will need to be considered in the charity as we move forward. As it stands, those paid also volunteer time too.

The FRP are struggling with capacity - we have a lot of areas we are involved in but lack people to lead and oversee. We also need to grow volunteer capacity - a lot falls to a few. Therefore the trustees will be continuing to plan strategy and help prioritise the friends activities and direction. The recent members survey is useful information to help with this.

#### **4. Treasurer's Report/Financial update**

The financial figures for 2020-21 are included in the chairs report. If people would like more detailed information they can contact Anthony at [treasurer@rowntreepark.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@rowntreepark.org.uk). The main unrestricted income for the FRP is membership and events. We also have a range of grant funding on the go (mainly linked to education, wildlife/biodiversity development, MHWB and reducing social isolation)

We currently have good amounts of funds in the unreserved money and it was asked if that was a problem with regard to the Charity Commission etc. Anthony (treasurer) explained that due to our income increase over the last two years we will need an independent financial audit to be arranged. Also that the reserves will be used up with the current plans, including paying a charity manager and increasing running costs. Therefore the trustees will be looking at how to keep the FRP financially viable. There are budgets given for the main areas of FRP activities where we have leads including gardening, education/children, events, wildlife etc. There is also a project budget that can be bid into during the year but those wishing to run a project (ideas are always welcomed).

There was also a discussion on how 'running costs' can't be covered by grants but 'projects' often can be. Therefore moving forward the FRP running costs have increased as our size of activities has grown but we will need to continue to look for funding for projects if there are people to lead on areas.

#### **5. Nomination/re election of committee/vacancies**

We also have a committee which are 'elected' members who opt to lead on specific areas. Those present included:

Currently as stands:

Stu Small - Gardening lead

Rosemary Bentley - lead on Sensory garden and Craft group

Louise Miller -Litter

Children's groups/activities - Christine Banham

Duck Food - Ruth Philips

Birds - Vikki O'Brien

All of the above were re-elected. We also have co-op members who are any one who want to be kept up to date on all activities and get involved as and when able. All existing members are happy to continue.

**Vacant positions** on the committee include- Secretary, Goose Lead, Music coordinator, Art Coordinator.

Other positions could be created if there was interest such as leads on merchandise and fundraising etc.

Anyone is welcome to ask to join the committee. Also people can run one off projects without committing to be on the committee, just get in touch!

#### **6. CYC report feedback**

##### **Dave Meigh - Operations Manager - Public Realm (Strategy and Contracts)**

The FRP keep a list of things we are asking the council about regarding the running and general issues in the park. We communicate with Dave regularly - at meetings he feeds back updates on key things.

Dave explained his role to new attendees - used to be called the Head of Parks and Open Spaces which was a clearer title. However his role now includes more - park care and street care in general. Dave has

had links to Rowntree Park for over 25 years and was involved in the 2000 lottery funded restoration of the park.

There has been a lot of restructuring in the council and people leaving. As it stands Dave is the only one with knowledge of park management/leadership on CYC. There used to be a team of 3 full time, but now it's just Dave and he's part time. Dave's department recently came under 'Waste' and there is a new manager who oversees all these areas (his specialism is waste). There is also a maintenance team of 3 leaders who oversee the whole city. The one that oversaw RP has recently retired and there is an interim leader.

- Therefore in Rowntree Park council teams/members involved are:
  - Dave Meigh - aims to oversee the management side - whole city
  - Gary (temp) - Maintenance (eg; mowing/clearing etc) - whole city
  - Jenny - Environment and Community Team - 1 of 4 who deal with the whole city

Jenny (Eco Team) has some focus on helping community groups (like Friends groups) across the city. They help set up volunteering programmes and provide tools and guidance. Also, Jenny works with York Cares who help organise workplace volunteering days in York. We get work based volunteers for some days in the year to help with gardening/maintenance in Rowntree Park.

### Council Funding and Parks strategy

There is not strategy or plan for council parks in York and hasn't been for a number of years. There is no further planning at present. The government has frozen council payments for the last few years which practically means that councils have to make budget cuts (as can't keep with rising costs). One of the areas affected by this in the last few years has been council parks. At this stage there is no plan to change the funding or approach - basic maintenance only.

### Flood Defences

The council have been investigating the flood wall/wall at the beck (near Cameron Grove entrance) over the last few months and are waiting on the survey. It's clear repairs need to happen. Waiting on the contractors.

### Drain Survey

There are several uneven areas where large quantities of water collect after heavy rain. These are mainly on the large field across to the Lovell street entrance and also near the 'horse'. Dave explained this is linked to these areas being lower than the lakes therefore don't drain out after heavy rain/floods. Also there may be an issue with drains on the streets near the park (the excess surface water flows down into the park) - so it's important locals keep one eye on drains and report blockages online via the council's website. CYC have been asked to investigate drain blockages in the park, but again it's on a list of things to do.

### Toilets

Lots of public complaints about the toilets this year. However massive issues with vandalism and ASB - two fires started in the toilets only in the last few days. Toilet seats have been replaced after smashed off in the summer. Aim is to find indestructible toilet roll holders. There has been a request for baby change facilities but this is unlikely to take place whilst vandalism happens. It's advised people use the cafe (run by York Explore).

The toilets are not looked after by council workers - Dave went to a contractor, Healthomatic, who also care for city centre toilets. This was because council workers were often called to other jobs and our toilets weren't getting checked. Healthomatic means to check the toilets 3 times a day and open and lock morning and night. Dave is aware there are some issues with this at times and is looking into this. Reports of similar destruction to public toilets in the city centre.

### Basketball Courts

Basketball courts were due to be cleaned and new nets - still waiting on the contractor. Was due in Summer, then postponed to October but still not done. Once cleaned the benches bought will be added.

### Big Kids Playpark

Sadly the unrailed play park is worse for wear and will need to be removed in the Spring. CYC does not have to replace it and is unlikely to have the funds to do so. However Dave is trying to see if he can get funding and will know in the Feb/March budget. If not then we will have to get thinking... Many older children value this area and wouldn't want to lose facilities.

### Tennis Pavillion

Updates on tennis pavilion - this is a 'run down' building near the skate park. It's been used for the last few years for storage of tennis and canoe club equipment. The building cannot be used in other ways at this stage. The tennis and canoe Club drew up plans a few years back to convert the building and have obtained some funding. They are currently awaiting the council to do a Section 123 notice (**Notice of Intended Disposal of Open Space Land**) where the public can give feedback on the plans/submit any concerns etc.

### Knotweed

We have knotweed in the park and have for a few years. This year it spread to new areas. Dave confirmed it is being chemically treated still and operatives know how to deal with it - as far as he knows.

### Cameron Grove Gate

Request from residents that the mesh on the gate on the outside also be added to the inside of the gate (the side that faces the park) to stop people using this to climb out. Dave confirmed this can happen but will need to await the blacksmiths availability.

### Doves/birds in dovecot

Over the last couple of years the 'dove' population has decreased and some birds have eye infections/deformities. It has been asked for the dove cot to be cleaned and the health of the birds checked. Dave confirmed he is trying to get this sorted and may introduce some new birds (if he can get the right advice).

The 'doves' are linked to the fact the park is a memorial park and were first introduced in 1921.

### Geese

We now have no Goose volunteer Team at present so it was asked what CYC responsibilities are. Response was 'nothing as they are wild birds' - however there is a 2010 document that outlines council responsibilities and what can be done. See here.

The FRP have requested more signs about not feeding the geese - Dave said he'd look into this.

### Skate park

Due to FRP requests - both entrances now open so the skate park feels 'less intimidating' to users. Also the hedge due to be cut back to open things up. FRP have asked if the 'cage' could be removed to open up the space/make it less separate (in hope of discouraging poor behaviour of a few). Dave sees no issue as the 'cage' is a hangover from when the space was a tennis court and also that original plans had intended to have a gate to the skatepark from Terry Avenue so it could be accessed when the park was closed, but this was refused at planning years ago.

### Lakes

Some members asking about the state of the ponds and what happens/what cleaning takes place - Dave stated that the council don't have to do anything and generally they are just left. However there is an algae radar in place.

### Mowing regime

No update on the mowing regime and if the maintenance team are keeping to the agreed document - will chase with Jenny who has been the link before.

### Park benches

Many in poor paint condition. Problem is water gets between the paint layers and bubbles. New benches that replace rotten ones will be oiled instead of painted. Some new round picnic benches bought by the FRP will be fitted soon. When CYC contractors can sort.

### **Jenny - ECO Team (not at meeting but sent updates):**

A few workplace volunteer groups in the park recently and another 2 groups are coming down on the 27<sup>th</sup> Oct.

Tasks completed by workplace volunteers recently include

#### Wildlife area

- Lining of new wildlife pond.
- Filled in bog garden, although it needs more.
- Cut hedge between bog garden and new pond.
- Cleared weeds from bases of fruit trees.
- Cleared grass from new hedge.
- Cut back path to beck area.

**Gardening** – workplace volunteer groups started tidying and clearing the beds near the basketball court/skatepark.

**Cascade** – this is an area the FRP were hoping the council would tidy up for the centenary years (2021). Due to floods and lockdowns which have meant no progress. Jenny's workplace volunteer teams are working on other beds at present but hope to get an idea of what could be done and maybe work out a plan.

**Bridge over the beck project (second bridge to create a circular walk)**– This is something I still want to progress as soon as volunteers and funds allow. Hopefully in 2022.

**Skatepark hedge** –'Payback' (Community Service group) have been doing some hedge cutting on Tuesdays and aim to do this one.

## **Part 2 - smaller group discussions**

The second half of the meeting enabled attendees to get refreshments and talk with key FRP members in projects/activities that interest them and find out more

### **General updates:**

General updates on recent fund raising and activities/projects will be circulated in the newsletter and social media.

*For further information on any of the above or to ask any questions/find out/get involved more contact abigail at [hello@rowntreepark.org.uk](mailto:hello@rowntreepark.org.uk)*