

# **Friends of Rowntree Park (FRP) Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022 Minutes**

## **Meeting held on Zoom**

**Attendees** – Abigail Gaines, Cath Mortimer, Stu Small, Stephen Dunsthorne, Rose Berl, June Hutt, Christine Banham, JennyLee (CYC ECO Team), Jane Duke, Olina Everett, Vikki O’Brien, Rachael Bevan, Dave Meigh (CYC), Val Punchard, Louise Hill, Pie Waller, Rebecca Dodgson, June Hutt.

*Apologies - Jan Kingdom, Margaret May, Louise Miller.*

### **1. Rosemary Bentley - Abigail**

FRP still grieving at sad loss of key volunteer Rosemary Bentley who died on Christmas Eve 2021. Thinking about what to do for a memorial. Her volunteers want to focus on the sensory garden, make it nice for summer and suggested renaming the garden after Rosemary. Other suggestions for additional memorial ideas welcomed.

Rosemary’s funeral was on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup>. People lined Bishopthorpe Road – the family overwhelmed by seeing all those who turned out.

Jan Kingdom is taking over the Tuesday Gardening lead from Rosemary. FRP hope to get someone else to be second-in-command for when Jan is unavailable.

**ACTIONS:** Make plans for the sensory garden, find a second-in-command for Tuesday group.  
Abigail and Stu to meet with Jan and continue to offer support.

### **2. Gardening – Stu Small**

Gardening is happening Monday to Friday most weeks so finally feeling they are getting on top of things. Park has avoided flooding so far this winter. Gardening team are currently concentrating on weeding and removing years of growth of things that have thrived in floods. People should notice more organisation of the long borders in the coming months and team are hoping gardens will look tidier in this, the year after the park centenary. Margaret May will be added to the co-opted committee as she is going to help with some planting in the rose pergola area and has offered help for the bowling green project.

Gardening currently has funding from Network Rail for tansy planting near Lovell St (bog area) and Yorkshire Water for the wildlife area (below). Funding from Natural England from a park user has been offered for the ex-labyrinth (accidentally mown by CYC) and wants to put wildflowers/meadow grasses in there. This will be low maintenance but linked to history of the area. The rest of the areas the FRP maintain are funded by FRP.

**ACTION:** Stu to send proposal to committee asap.

### **3. Wildlife areas - Christine**

We are currently developing several areas in the park, creating habitat for wildlife and boosting numbers.

At the Lovell St entrance we are creating ponds. Froglife have been offered funding for the pond here. (They also have funding for Leeds and Sheffield, and areas all over York). The pond has been on cards for some months and Christine finally got an email today (20.1.22) to say the contractor is

starting next week: they will put fencing round the site to make it safe and then excavate. The pond doesn't need lining – there should be clay underneath, and it should be a natural pond to attract all sorts. But it will need tidying up and planting after pond made – not sure who will be paying for that but FRP will look into this. There may be an issue with vehicles crossing the currently wet park, churning up mud etc – they will make any damage good, Jenny from the council has already spoken to them. Yorkshire Water is funding a pond-dipping platform for the Lovell street pond as part of the 'wildlife area funding': it should be big enough to take a school class.

Butcher Terrace field – there has been a lot happening over past 6 months. Lots of volunteer groups – corporate teams, Good Gym coming monthly, if not more. They have been doing lots of shovelling and lifting. The small pond is almost done – it's in place, lined, has sandbags round to cover the liner so hopefully UV rays won't damage it. It needs soil and grass seed over spring. The bog ( the old pond) has been filled in – there are still issues, it's not draining well, but we can probably use sandbags. It will be wet in winter, and dry out in summer, but plants will help. There is also hedging in, 13 trees, birch, etc – this area will be used for carving, firewood, woodland management skills.

There will be lots to do in spring but Christine is very pleased with the progress that has been made and very grateful to the volunteers who have come in.

**ACTIONS:** Stu to let Abigail know when the specific sessions for volunteers are to run for the tansy Beetle area. Orchard Day with Abundance York on Sat 29th Jan and Wed 9th Feb to prune our apple trees. Sort out planting for Lovell St pond when it is ready.

#### **4. Litter**

Louise the head litter picker is taking some time off training volunteers owing to family circumstances. Cath Mortimor has offered to induct any new recruits in this time.

There have been complaints about offal in park – someone is possibly feeding the foxes, getting offcuts etc!

**ACTIONS:** Cath will train some litter pickers – 5 or 6 waiting for their induction. Try to recruit a deputy lead to help.

#### **5. Birds - Vikki**

29<sup>th</sup> – RSPB Big garden Bird Watch vent in the park. Local RSPB group sending a volunteer to be at the event where birds will be counted and bird feeders made. Also hoping the RSPB run further events such as walks aimed at adults to spot birds and identify bird calls.

Vikki has topped up bird food, so it's all sorted til the end of winter. Vikki, Sue and Jan are regularly feeding birds: they are not winning squirrel wars but have put in a specific squirrel feeder to try and attract them to that instead. They have cleaned out all bird feeders so RSPB will be impressed.!

**ACTION:** Promote RSPB birdwatch and arrange Feb and March sessions (Vikki & Abigail)

#### **6. Craft group**

The craft group was set up Rosemary and Sara. It's an informal meeting once a week where people work on their own projects and chat, or work on projects for the park (e.g. poppies, rainbows,

Tommy the willow soldier). However, Sara has moved away, and Rosemary has died, so it is without a 'leader', but the group still exists and will carry on meeting.

The group had a grant to run Jan-March 2022 for a project for people with mental health issues, experiencing social isolation etc, and without Sara and Rosemary, the group will now hand this grant back as it's too much pressure for what is a social group.

However, it meets 1.30-3 on Tuesdays, all welcome, so come along. They will do a pond project, scaled down from the funded one and there will still be some sort of installation in the park. Have been offered support by Abigail if they want funding, to run sales or hang displays in the park.

**ACTION:** Return craft group mental health project funding. Keep the craft group going and support as and when needed (abigail)

### **7. Children and young people - Christine.**

Various groups are continuing to meet as they should – home educators, forest school for preschoolers and primary age children once a month, plus a secondary group on Wednesday after school to work towards their John Muir award.

The Mind group is having a rest over the winter and will restart in spring.

The Yorkshire Water funding includes community engagement – it will work with schools and families to do education sessions for all the planting that needs doing. Awaiting full confirmation of the LNER grant that will also result in sessions aimed at children and adults.

### **8. Friends general info - Abigail**

Trustees oversee everything (strategy/finances etc). The committee are the ones who decide on and lead projects. As many people can join the committee as they want and can lead projects if they choose. FRP currently have too few people 'leading' so please spread the word. The park belongs to the community. FRP also host external events, bookings for which are made through us: e.g. yoga, Kindermusik, tai chi. The groups are often linked to FRP aims – mental health, fitness etc. If you know someone looking for outside venue, let FRP know.

Membership– FRP currently have 900 members, but need more to be actively involved. But their money helps fund what FRP do regardless. FRP had only 100 members in 2017 when Abigail joined. But only 50 % of members from the YO23 postcode, so people across York value the park and travel long way for events. Membership money supports gardening, plants, free events like nature walks.

**ACTION:** Spread the word to recruit more people to be actively involved

### **9. Lodge project update – Abigail and Stephen**

The Park Lodge has been empty since the park keeper's redundancy in 2017. FRP are putting together plans to present to the council to create a community building. A team led by Simon Town put together a business plan for the Council and took it as far as they were able with their time commitments. In March last year the Council agreed in principle to hand the Lodge over for a 99 lease at a peppercorn rent, giving the park team until March 2022 to tell them more detail on the plans. Stu originally led on this but decided to step down due to lack of capacity and a need to focus

on the gardening/grants. Johnny Hayes has now come forward to be project lead but wanted to check that the committee were OK for him to proceed. Abigail and Christine have met with Johnny as has Stephen. This is a much bigger project than anything FRP have done in the past. There was an initial meeting with a few people from the local community – some were keen to be involved but none offered to lead on specific areas as hoped. Hoping a new lead and a plan may bring direction. Dave Meigh said there is “urgency but no urgency” – FRP need to report in March 2022 that something is happening, that there is “energy”. Louise asked Dave Meigh – how much did Council read the original business plan for the exec meeting March 2021 to make the decision? It part of a series of similar projects that were all approved in the meeting in March 2021 but the FRP were asked to come back with more in March 2022. Dave confirmed very light attention was paid to the details and suggested that the FRP may need more evidence of funds for the project. Abigail stated that the business plan made suggestions of funding/grants that could be applied for but there is a Catch 22 situation: FRP can’t apply for funding without guarantees from council on specif issues such as the asbestos/rewiring (need a firm timescale) and also things such as a draft lease. Basically need these things to get secured funding as all grants have time scales. However Dave stated that CYC need to see evidence of funding before they start the asbestos work etc. Dave suggested that these questions/issues the FRP have need raising with the CYC Exec.

**ACTION:** Johnny Hayes as Lodge lead approved by the committee. Now FRP must build a team to support him and engage with council to work out what they need by March. Contact those who expressed an interest before (abigail). Clear review of the business plan needs to happen in light of Covid as people are working from home more, meeting in person less etc. Stephen to continue to support as Ink trustee and confirm with Johnny that he is the lead for the Lodge Action Group.

#### **10. Section 123 notices - Abigail**

There are two section 123 notices in for tennis courts and pavilion, regarded as “disposal of public land”. Abigail checked all present were familiar with what this meant – all were. The Park Lodge will be a further section 123 notice in time. More info in the Jan members newsletter.

#### **11. Funding update (Abigail).**

FRP funding comes from membership, events, duck food and merchandise. The FRP calendar sold better than expected, returning £900 profit.

FRP also have various grants: Ways to Wellbeing and Benenden – for social prescribing just coming to an end. The government are backing green social prescribing pilot projects including NHS Yorkshire/Humber. There was some grants available but FRP did not apply as not enough people to lead projects/at capacity at present BUT have agreed to work with them and take referrals for our volunteering programmes (helping MHWB).

The Bettys Trees for Life pollinator project is now coming to an end. Micklegate ward funding was awarded for history and nature walks and chess bench. Chess bench still not in place as awaiting on CYC contractors.

LNER funding is also in the pipeline for forest school activities but this not properly in the public domain yet. FRP will update at the next meeting in April.

**ACTION:** Need more people to run projects and therefore access more funding. Ideas on how to recruit welcomed!

## **12. Council**

1. Dave and Jenny from City of York Council were present. Dave introduced himself as the park “landlord”, Business teams have been very quiet recently (with none coming in December or January) owing to working from home guidelines. There is one booked in for 14<sup>th</sup> February as the first of 2022. Jenny has been supporting Goodgym in wildlife areas.
2. Jenny feels there is capacity to do more with the designated CYC flower beds, though the Cascade seems overwhelming. Last year they tried to clear beds near the basketball court and skate park to see what there was to do. There is no Japanese knotweed on this site. Jenny needs to see what can manage with volunteers as and when. Over spring teams will re-weed these beds and put more plants in then see what to tackle next. They can do some things with the Crescent beds but Japanese knotweed was still spreading under hedges (it has been treated). The crescent beds are often flagged by park visitors as an area needing work, but the knotweed is the issue why these beds are mainly left (top stop the spread).
3. The Environment Agency will plant trees as part of flood defence mitigation and others throughout park. Originally this was to be when they finished all the flood work rather than this planting season – but they are doing some soon in the wildlife area as working wood requested by Christine for the project.
4. Stu pointed out that a council operations team came in and cut everything down in the Crescent beds: he was concerned about the knotweed issues and was worried they got carried away and that we might need to connect and have a conversation. Jenny said if they haven’t disturbed soil it should all be OK and there is now a new supervisor for this side of city who is easier to work with.
5. Dave Meigh: a new structure is being developed and there is an interim arrangement in place with no one overseeing staff. He needs a new manager with gardening knowledge, and is shortstaffed generally. Ben who oversees parks and waste has only been in post 12 months and is still getting to grip[s] with the role as well.
6. Stu said FRP are grateful for the Community Payback work being done on Tuesdays and asked if they could do more. Dave urged caution as they can be quite brutal/drastring without proper supervision. Stu suggested that they could work on the area near Lovell St removing various things or work on double digging beds. Jenny to speak to them about this. Jenny wasn’t sure if they were still coming into the park but they were here this week Abigail confirmed.
7. Christine suggested that her John Muir teenagers cut the brambles – they love doing work like this. Planting activities are better for younger kids.
8. Dave Meigh – Staffing problem in property team. Ian has been off sick for months, and he was managing the flood wall survey (near Cameron Grove entrance) and construction of the permanent flood gates near the café and general drainage, discussing with consultants etc. The flood wall and flood gates were prioritised but have made no progress in his absence.
9. Because the flood wall near Cameron Grove is in such poor condition the park must now close when the river reaches 3.1m (instead of 3.4m) so the water does not press against wall with people in the park. So without the remedial work happening the park will have to shut more often which affects users and events, but does keep everyone safe.

10. Play area – the unfenced play area equipment is falling apart, and scheduled for removal in March 2022. It is 30+ years old, its timbers have rotted from top down, and it is beyond economical repair. The council will put notice up in advance. There is no money for a replacement YET. Dave was going to package together the play area and flood work for council process but without Ian he will ask for money for the play area in the September budget, meaning funds if awarded would be available in Jan 2023. Abigail will have to think what FRP can do if can't get a replacement. Concern is that all fund raising may need to go into the Lodge project and not the play area. Abigail's 'Make Space for Girls' showed this area is well used by older children (including girls) and it's loss will heighten the problem of teenage girls not using parks/exercising. There was the hope that a funded play area could involve the views of local older girls in the design and create something meaningful to the local community.
11. Seating – lots of requests for memorial benches across the city. Had to prioritise getting those installed, so therefore Dave hasn't sorted out the FRP chess table getting put in place. There is a new bench to go near café, and will be another one in the summer. Dave should be in RP with installer for picnic bench– Dave will be in touch in 2 weeks. Abigail concerned that one of the two benches bought has disappeared from compound – Dave not looked for it, been too busy but will check.
12. Doves – Dave asked Gary to have a look inside the dovecote, does not know yet what he found. Will buy doves but needs to check the best time of year to do this. Will have to wait till after flood season. Rosemary had found an expert to ask about this, possibly the guy who feeds them at 2.30 every afternoon, but possibly someone else? Either way, we need to find a knowledgeable bird person. Need to find out why numbers have decreased, is it because of disease, age, predators?
13. Green Flag judging – Park is up for its 2-year inspection, this will happen in May/June time.
14. Dave has done nothing about new goose signs – will have to wait for the new financial year now. FORP will need to clean the ones we have – Jenny will ask Good Gym on Monday 24.1.22
15. Cameron Grove gate mesh to stop people climbing out requested by Cameron Grove residents. Dave will speak to council blacksmiths when they install new benches for basketball court on Friday.
16. New toilet roll holders: still waiting for them, there are supply issues. New handles coming for disabled toilet as someone got in got locked in: the handle was broken to get them out.
17. Park closing times – Dave will email early next week, to discuss what security company can deliver. Currently, still kicking people out at 3.50pm. The Punchards who live near a park gate said they let a group out 3x week – every 2-3 days. Dave will email the security company about this. Are they leaving one gate open, doing a few circuits? Someone rough sleeping in the park found by them.
18. Dave alerted FRP that a construction company has permission to park overnight in car park Mon-Thursday. They are doing work elsewhere, but staying in bed and breakfast on Bishy Rd and can't leave vehicles where working.
19. Val asked for it to be noted that tried to get lasers back from Dave Rowsell for goose busting but had no success. Abigail to contact again. Abigail said there is still no team leader for goose busting– Ruth may try.

**ACTIONS:** Jenny to speak to Good Gym to clean goose signs. Jenny to speak to Community Payback team to see if they can do more work in digging beds/clearing Lovell St area. Jenny to meet new supervisor to discuss Crescent beds.

Dave to speak to Gary about dovecote findings. FRP to try to speak to a dove expert if we can find one of the best time to add new doves to the colony.

Dave to speak to blacksmith about Cameron Grove gate mesh.

Dave to locate missing picnic bench and get the two picnic benches installed and update abigail.

Dave to email security company about timings for the coming year and also to alert them about high numbers of people getting locked in before 4pm.

FRP to recruit new goose team lead and to try and get lasers back from Dave Rowsell.

Christine to get John Muir teenagers to work on brambles – liaise with Stu.

**Any Other Business** – Tom Punchard posted a comment that there is lead flashing on chimney of lodge. Dave to look at?

**Next meeting** April 28<sup>th</sup> 7pm, hopefully in the café if the local Covid situation has improved.