

Minutes of Friends of Rowntree Park (FRP) Meeting 28th April 2022.

Attendees:

Committee: *Rebecca Dodgson, Abigail Gaines, Christine Banham, Stu Small, Val Punchard, Jan Kingdom*

Trustees: *Cath Mortimer, Matt Segar, Stephen Dunsthorne*

CYC - *Dave Meigh*

Members/volunteers: *Lynn Bilton, Jilly Lovett, Jane Joplin, June Hutt, Rose Berl, Pie Waller, Mike Hobbs, Jenny Houghhton Young, Daniel Gruber, Jim & Hazel Cowan, Tracey Vaughn, Maria Gimeno, Kate Lock.*

Apologies: Vikki O'Brien, Anthony Chester, Polly Bennett, Racheal Bevan, Linda Wainwright, Margaret May, Hugo Bentley, Jenny Lee.

1. Welcome – Abigail, Charity Manager.

- This meeting had more attendees than ever before. Abigail outlined the meeting structure, i.e. a quick recap of previous meeting and events/issues since, then Dave Meigh from the Council would speak, followed by a chance to discuss items in small groups if so desired.
- Brief introduction to committee members and/or park trustees present.

2. Previous meeting points of action/ Events and issues since

2.1 Gardening – Stu Small

- The previous meeting's action was to find someone to take over the sensory garden from Rosemary. Jan has stepped forward for the Tuesday volunteers. Jan said everyone wanted to carry on the garden in Rosemary's memory.
- The park is trying to raise money for memorial tree for the sensory garden. Abigail has posted the link on social media and on posters in the park telling people how to donate. FRP need to raise a few hundred pounds for a well-established tree. FRP want it in as soon as possible – Rosemary's birthday on May 15th, when FRP is having an informal picnic 12-2 to celebrate her life.
- FRP have four permanent days of the week for volunteer gardening outside of bank holidays. There has been a good response of new volunteers since the flood – and the team's main focus is on recovering from this. Some plants have survived, particularly bulbs, but there is also damage in the gardens, and lots of things have died. The team are trying their best.
- Stu thanked all who come along and help – FRP have a lot of committed gardeners, and Stu enjoys meeting all those who volunteer. One volunteer, Margaret May, who looks after corner of Bishy Road/Scarcroft, has generously donated and planted some roses in the pergola area and is caring for them. Gill Kershaw takes ownership for the rockery.
- Jenny is now looking after the beds near basketball court and skateboard park and working on them with work volunteer groups when she has them in. Tuesdays they have the "community payback" team in. FRP also running weekend activities in wild areas.
- Bowling green – there was a plan to have investment from Natural England (FRP was originally approached by a skateboarder dad as a contact) to plant one bowling green up with more suitable grasses and wildflowers - a 'micro ing' area to replace the labyrinth that was mowed in error by CYC operatives in 2020. After lots of investigations and discussions, it was decided the project would take too much capacity away from FRP other areas and more funding would be needed. For now this area will remain an open space for play and activities.
- Embankment near the new pond – FRP have Transpennine funding for tansy plants, and are clearing brambles etc. The York tansy beetle folk will hopefully give us beetles at the appropriate time. Some students have been helping in this area.
- Wildlife area behind EA compound – there was a hope that the compound would be going in June, but this is probably delayed. Christine got funding for the Wildlife Area from Yorkshire Water. Hedging and a gate have been put in to keep it contained to make it a safe space for wildlife and education groups. (FRP have school visits to this area etc who need children contained.) FRP filled in the bog garden to replace the leaking old pond after repairs failed. The bog garden is to attract amphibian, wet-loving wildlife! FRP have had plants and money donated, but there is lots of space to fill. The new pond behind the bog garden is also awaiting planting. Already got a lot of pondlife – ponds, newts, hoping for pond snails.

Next stage is to finish planting and work on the wildflower meadow. Apple trees have been pruned but cherries and plums need doing. Will have bits to do forever. Had some scything support from St Nicks.

- There will be wildlife volunteering days next two Saturdays if people want to give a hand – digging, clearing, planting.
- The wildlife area will also get benches in. It's already attracting lots of butterflies.

Saturday 7th May, 11am: it's hoped that Alison Sinclair the first FRP chair at 11am, will be coming to install a tree and plaque donated for the park centenary, followed by a cup of tea. It would be appreciated if people come by to say hello. Check FRP social media etc for updates on this.

2.2 Litter – Litter lead Louise is taking a break so Cath is now training volunteers. There are lots of new volunteers, some days there are lots of litter others none.

2.3 Birds - RSPB garden bird watch for kids and adults took place. Two breakfast with the birds events were very successful.

2.4 Craft activities

- Jan: Craft Group is still meeting on Tuesdays, working on wildlife related ideas. No one knew what Rosemary's plans for this year were but they are hoping to have pond-related yarn garlands hanging in the rose garden by the Jubilee weekend. They are knitting/crocheting items. Anyone can get involved so please do!
- Heather recently held a cane and willow craft event and will be doing more. FRP need more volunteers to help out at these events, even if just to make a cup of tea for the volunteers.

2.5 Education groups – Christine.

- New groups funded by LNER – two new ones out of three have started, all about mental wellbeing. A group for “tween girls” aged 10-16 started Wed 27th April, its focus is moving away from social media and image, to encourage girls to make new friends, build resilience. Friday afternoons have parental support nature time group for babies and some older children. This is aimed to fill the gaps left by Covid with people not being able to go to playgroups etc. The one which hasn't started yet will be an adult group, a woodland craft group, similar to the work FRP already do with Mind, for people who want to have a nice time outside doing mindful crafty things.

2.6 Events and Membership - Abigail

- Easter events. Made over £600. FRP have a booking system now so know numbers to expect.
- Membership – over 900 members to support work we do with for £5 a year, they then receive newsletters, café and event discounts. While FRP welcome this income, the issue is how do we convert members to being actively involved?
- There are 117 volunteers on FRP database –some come weekly, some once a year. FRP want to continue spreading the word.

2.7 Lodge update - Steven (for Johnny Hayes)

- Johnny Hayes is project manager. They are putting a plan together – asbestos removal, redecoration, modernisation all required, and the team are working with the council.
- A kick-off meeting for the project a month ago was organised by Johnny, they met out at York cemetery as they have a 'similar' building.
- Owing to the practical issues with asbestos, the project will move slowly, but they have a formal agreement with the council, the asbestos should be coming out next year. If the project goes ahead, it's likely that a lift would need putting in - which affects the cafe (York Explore), so negotiations and plans how it will work for both parties to be discussed.
- The team have met with Explore and will meet again to show them upstairs, as co-tenants of building. The team is trying to strike up a partnership with Explore, who are wanting to run more community events as they are a community group.
- The hope is that the project will gather pace over the coming months. Then need to decide what will FRP do with the completed Lodge? Most park events are outside. But the hope is that other groups will come forward to use it.

- **ACTION:** to get an agreement in place so the Lodge team know when works can be timetabled and how much they need to fundraise in order to get the rest of the work done. Contact Steven or Johnny if you want to get involved, particularly if you have ideas as to what could happen.

3. Council Update - Dave Meigh

Introduced himself and explained his and Jenny Lee's role for newcomers:

Dave - Head of Public Realms. Dave has jobs right across the city – parks, allotments, etc. He is a kind of “landlord” - deals with the big picture, problems that need fixing etc. There should be two people – but his counterpart role is vacant and won't be filled until the autumn. This will be the person in charge of ‘operations’ (getting things done like mowing, cutting etc). Temporary person leading on this area.

Jenny - is part of the Environment and Community Team which is made up of 4 people. Jenny acts as link between community and management, coordinates activities in the park with workplace volunteers. She works on both CYC tasks to be done and also helps the FRP. The Eco team help support volunteer groups like the FRP.

Dave stated that FRP were once the ‘icing on the cake’, but now they are a big part of the cake as they do so much - and he wanted to start by thanking everybody, as the park wouldn't be like it is without all the FRP volunteers.

The Public Realm team got merged with waste management; their manager is currently reviewing the service, but also has council fleet to look after, so everyone is spread thinner and thinner. There is also a serious staff shortage of frontline staff – bin men, mowers etc. Only have 9 out of 11 mowers owing to people on long-term sick. They are trying to recruit people to backfill roles.

Dave ran through a long list of projects/ongoing issues in the park to update us on progress or any new issues.

Dave has been involved in the park for 30 years, and it's showing its age again. He was in the park yesterday with a new colleague from Property and Maintenance to price up jobs. These include:

- A fire risk assessment for the café: the basement is not up to scratch, actions have to be put into place.
- Lead slippage on café roof: flashing has moved in a number of places. Will need scaffolding to replace this, therefore will do gutters, fix mortar and pointing at the same time.
- There are loose bricks by café toilets, rotten and damaged timbers in the dovecote, missing bricks, gutters need cleaning in the toilet building. The depot needs timber work. These are all minor issues dragging the park down, he is trying to get them fixed –has sent schedule of works.
- Bigger issue – the unfenced children's play area pre-dates 1996, and is rotting from the top down, the park is living with it for now but it has to come out. Dave keeps pushing this back. He will take off the rails that are a trip hazard, and will wait for next insurance inspection to see when it REALLY has to come out.
- Council has a blacksmith team – 2 men, currently fixing benches for the basketball court, making a mesh for the Cameron Grove gate, both projects have been with them for months, don't know yet when these will actually happen. (The blacksmiths also do roadwork signs, crash barriers, etc.)
- The Mercury statue was too specialist for the blacksmiths to repair. The base is hollow, the cast bronze, they can't work out how to get the statue foot on to the plinth, so it will go off to Minster engineering for specialist metal workers to fix it. Date unknown.
- There are drainage problems all over. When the café was refurbished, a sink was plumbed into the basement to go into lake. Someone has been putting milk down the sink and this is therefore going into the lake. This has to stop. Will replumb the sink in question into the proper drainage network.
- Toilets were shut over Easter – there is an old pipe into sewers, which is bent and 60 years old so keeps getting blocked. Flooding has made it worse. Some days the toilets were locked, other days they were open when they shouldn't have been. Agreement is that they should have shut earlier, as they were disgusting if open. Project – re-lay the drains.
- Café toilets also have a problem – sewer doesn't have enough downwards slope and is a bit flat, so waste gets stuck. Café trying to buy thinner toilet roll and making people aware not to put blue paper towels down the toilet.
- Park general draining is bad – very boggy down one end. Year 2000 they installed new drainage pattern – but not enough rodding points, so via manholes can clean one way not the other. Will install mini inspection chambers so can blast mess down the park.

- New pond Lovell St created by Froglife (and supported by eco team and FRP). This has not worked as it was intended and needs to be sorted. Initially we will contact Froglife to see if they can put some issues right but after that we need to remedy the other issues that emerged. CYC said they will help if needed. Loose plan is to create a series of interlinking ponds, move the fence and platform, as currently you can't get to the pond. Christine voiced that the FRP wish we kind of it hadn't started it as it's just created work and cost.
- Park closing time. Should now be 8pm but Gary has not changed the gate signs. Will move to 10pm after this May BH weekend. (Park still being closed by Council security contractor).
- Doves – still waiting as before, Gary needs to go in, need expert to advise us as to when. One member with a home dovecote says you just need to put a net over it so the new doves can't get out and predators can't get in. But park already has five doves in, this is new blood stock. (Old doves don't seem to be breeding. Can't kill old ones. They are peace doves - said by some to be descendents of the original ones. Suggested by attendee that could bring in new mini dovecote to split them up, but this will need volunteers to look after them.)

Other points

Benches - FRP still chasing the bench to be installed in basketball court and picnic bench for Sensory Garden.

Discussed removal of skatepark railings as a possibility to 'open out' and integrate to the park - is possible but costly.

Electricity - FRP need electricity in ampiearthare checking before events this summer and key for toilets

Green waste - To locate new 'green waste' pile so not in way of events his summer - dave top make sure Ops move by July 1st.

EA Compound - plans said they'd make area 'as good as new' - but details included only adding grass seed once compound has gone. Need to raise awareness of this and see if more can be one or field will be a muddy mess for years.

Green Flag judging end of May

***ACTION** – put callout for doves experts in newsletter. Raise awareness that the EA 'good as new' means just grass seed? Push for more?*

People were asked for any questions for Dave Meigh :

Fenced play area. Will it go? Yes. Will it be replaced – don't know.

40k approximate cost for new play equipment – FRP/Council don't have that, Dave will have to bid for money over winter for next financial year. But will be competing with drains and other works, plus flood wall on Cameron Grove. Or FRP have to fundraise but they don't want to yet as hope is that the council will replace the play area. This play area is used by older kids, and seen as valuable, it's especially good for older girls. Can't be refurbished, or this would be almost as costly as has to be pulled apart like Lego: could put new timbers in, but the metal framework would then be 40 years old too. Possibly other areas where could put overflow play area but the feedback is it is in a good location as kids can be near other people and not hidden away. There will eventually be a long consultation regarding a replacement. Another question: could LNER collaborate? But that is separate funding, a community investment fund linked to projects. They won't fund the council, only charities. FRP could match-fund as did before. Working with Make Space for Girls to use that space well.

***ACTION:** FRP to keep an eye out for suitable grants for play area. If we go the wellbeing-sports route there may be something. Anyone have knowledge? Also to raise awareness of issues with local councillors and seek support.*

Does York Council have a long term plan/strategy for parks? Ruth said Leeds City Council have a strategy for play parks. York seems so piecemeal in comparison. Is there scope for a strategy, plan? Dave Meigh replied that it's a political area. Abigail previously contacted Cllr Widdowson, but was just put in touch with Dave! What can FRP do? Political pressure? How? The Council consists of elected members and they currently have a ruling coalition who choose where money goes. If they wanted a park strategy they would instruct Dave to write one. General political discussion: during Covid people realised that green spaces matter – therefore we need cash in local government, can't go from zero to 100% to improve green spaces. Mental health projects are using green spaces for social prescribing, but footpaths, facilities are rundown in parks etc. There is no correlation between the nation's health and the health of green spaces. They are two separate things that aren't joined up. Social prescribing takes pressure off the NHS yet no one is repairing the footpaths in the park.

ACTION: Suggested encouraging members to write to local councillors and also for FRP to raise awareness that local political pressure is the only way to get change -make parks a priority in elections next year. Put together a position statement.

4. **Any other business?**

- Meeting adjourned, with the opportunity for people to have informal chats with the committee if they wanted.
- Next meeting Thursday 21st July, 7pm Park Café.