

## Chair's Report: The work of the Friends of Rowntree Park, 2021-22

As a registered charity (number 1183948), our aims are to:

- Conserve, protect and improve the physical space/environment of the park
- Offer educational opportunities related to history, biodiversity and other aspects
- Provide opportunities for education, recreation and other leisure interests
- Promote civic responsibility, volunteering, health and wellbeing.

Over the year, the Friends have been doing a huge range of activities which contribute to more than one of these aims. As ever, there's been a particular focus on family/children's activities (e.g. Forest School, Very Young Friends, Wild Ones) and on gardening (e.g. the Sensory garden, the long borders, wildlife areas). Craft and nature sessions have contributed to our work on mental health and wellbeing. Other activity areas include bird feeding, litter-picking, the lodge project and acquiring new skills such as scything. We continue to work closely with the council to report issues and suggest improvements.

There are around 50 regular volunteers, organised by team leaders for each area of activity; together, they contribute more than 2500 volunteer hours a year. With the loss of Rosemary Bentley, who died in December 2021, the Friends lost a major supporter; Rosemary was a constant presence in the park, leading the Sensory Garden project and driving forward many other projects. In the summer, the Friends organised a celebration of Rosemary's life and many contributions to the park, attended by friends and family members. A tree has been planted in her memory, and a memorial bench is planned; the Tuesday gardeners say that their continuing work in the Sensory Garden is also in her memory.

Members pay a small annual membership fee and they are kept in touch with all the different areas of the Friends work with a monthly newsletter, as well as by our comprehensive website and lively social media presence.

The charity's income comes from membership, events, and selling merchandise and duck food. In addition we have had grants for projects in this financial year from LNER, Yorkshire Water, First Transpennine and the Micklegate Ward. In this year, we also concluded the grants we had with Ways to Wellbeing, Benenden Health, Betty's Trees for Life, Mind and the Police Commissioner's fund.

The charity has a paid charity manager, Abigail Gaines; she works part-time, looking after the volunteers and our 1035 members, as well as co-ordinating our wide-ranging activities. Those leading the Forest School and gardening strands receive payment for some of their work and we have recently started paying for a few hours of admin/finance help.

As a charity, our trustees have the job of overseeing the work of the Friends, making sure that we are working legally and responsibly. Our trustees have been busy updating policies and developing a strategy. One of our trustees (Rachael Bevan) had to resign due to health issues: a list of our current trustees is on the website.

The charity's draft accounts for 2021/22 are being prepared throughout October and will be approved at the next trustees' meeting. Full approved accounts will be provided for information at the next committee meeting. The current draft position is that there is roughly a £4,000 profit on unrestricted funds. Hence, there are sufficient funds to continue to do our work and to have the increased levels of paid support that are necessary; however, staff and trustees will maintain close attention to the financial situation, throughout the year to ensure sustainability.

To find out more, check out our website [rowntreepark.org.uk](http://rowntreepark.org.uk) or contact us via email: [hello@rowntreepark.org.uk](mailto:hello@rowntreepark.org.uk)