

## **Friends of Rowntree Park AGM October 13<sup>th</sup> 2022**

**Present:** Abigail Gaines, Cath Mortimer, Christine Banham, Tom and Val Punchard, Dave Meigh (CYC), Ainslie (Pie) Waller, Stu Small, Vikki O'Brien, Kay Guppy, Maria Gimeno, Mike Hobbs, Margaret May, Linda Wainwright

**Apologies:** Hugo Bentley, Anthony Chester

### **1. Introductions** – Abigail Gaines

Abigail briefly introduced everyone in attendance.

### **2. Chair's Report** – Cath Mortimer

Cath thanked everyone for coming and presented the chair's report (see Appendix A). Some key points are summarised below:

- FRP have around 50 volunteers clocking up 2,500 hours between them each year. Rosemary has been a huge loss for the volunteer teams.
- The gardening areas have expanded since FRP began working in the park (e.g. rockery, wildlife garden, Terry Avenue beds). Workplace volunteer teams have been gardening flower beds near skatepark/basketball court and helped with the beck area bridge and wildlife area benches. In addition to Stu's regular weekly sessions, FRP also run ad hoc sessions in the wildlife area. Some gardeners, thanks to a WhatsApp group, are also meeting ad hoc for extra sessions.
- As it is growing as a charity, FRP needs more staff and technical systems to deal with rising pressures, e.g. offering extra paid gardening sessions, the Xero accounting system, Bookwhen, JointIt (membership). Systems such as these save FRP a lot of work in the long term. FRP have to pay for these systems, but they save a lot of time. We need to consider how to meet the costs moving forward for the increased size of the organisation and what we do.
- The park has seven trustees although most were indisposed and unable to attend the AGM.
- The park's accounts are being finalised and will be presented to the trustees at the next meeting for approval, before being sent to the Charity Commission. Based on provisional figures, last financial year FRP made a small surplus of £4,000: Approximately £26,000 was expended, income was £24,000. HOWEVER - moving forward with the current predicted costs, we will be running at a deficit.
- Abigail Gaines stressed the need to pay close attention to the finances and to have a proper strategy going forward. FRP have had grants in the past to help with gardening and projects such as wellbeing programmes but these are harder to obtain now. FRP has increasing costs – staff, online systems. Gardening has costs and is an essential part of FRP work but doesn't raise funds in itself. Currently next financial year FRP are now going to spend more money than will be brought in and this is an issue for trustees. They need to think about whether FRP raise the membership fee, what FRP need money for, how FRP will raise extra funds etc. People need to get involved, have their say. If FRP want to keep things up, need people to fundraise.

### **3. Members survey results: Abigail Gaines. 250 replies.**

There were 250 replies to the annual FRP survey. The results are in Appendix B. Some general observations:

- More people are aware of the role and responsibilities of FRP (e.g. which areas FRP garden), probably thanks to newsletters and social media posts. The survey shows how long people have been members. (There is a new membership taken out every day.) Most members still don't volunteer, reasons for this were given in the survey. If people can't volunteer, they maybe offer financial support instead.

- What's the most important thing for FRP members? Gardening, the physical space looking good. But more members opted for more "environmental" things like biodiversity, plus issues like mental health, as well as communicating with the council on their behalf.
- 68% of members attend FRP events.
- Posters and Facebook are the main sources of information for FRP members about events.
- There were lots of nice comments about what people love about Rowntree Park/ FRP. More info and feedback can be found [here](#).

#### **4. Gardening Update - Stu Small**

Stu wanted to say how amazing sensory garden is looking. It has exceeded all expectations, especially how hard this was without Rosemary at the helm, and despite the hot summer/ hosepipe ban. He wants the long borders to look that good. The long borders are a gradual job between floods. ("This time next year..." etc). He also wanted to give a shout out to Margaret who looks after corner on Bishy Road and donated and cares for planting on the rose pergola. Margaret has put in 4 new roses so far, has more in the offing, she is just checking they are not getting "rose sick".

#### **5. Forest School Update - Christine Banham**

- FRP Forest School has a new wellbeing programme, in addition to its normal groups like forest school, lots of family events etc. Forest School have brought in extra people – e.g. Ellen Day is helping with Wild Ones and she may also set up the Home Ed group again. Katie is in charge of the slow stitching group. For the first time, Forest School will be moving indoors after half term as wellbeing activities will move to Southlands Church. This is as the evenings get darker, but vulnerable people etc still want to meet as the wellbeing activities are important to them. Wild Ones had been due to end but it has been a big success, so FRP don't want it to stop. Therefore FRP have moved some LNER budget lines around so the group can run up until Christmas.
- The wildlife area also very positive. Particular noteworthy is the help given by a volunteer called Rebecca J, who has set up the WhatsApp group for volunteers. This has all made a big difference to the site.
- Abigail noted FRP are getting more volunteers at events, e.g. at Hello to Autumn. This makes everything feel much more fun.

#### **6. Council Update: Dave Meigh**

- Dave started by saying thank you to everybody on the FRP committee and all the volunteers. He is astounded by how much gets done. FRP have filled a big void, taken the park beyond what it was before, really reflecting on what the local community wants. It's good we now have lots of people sharing the work.
- He also wished to say thanks to Jenny and all she does and to the various work groups as they help council deliver their side of the bargain. (Stu noted that people are travelling a long way to help FRP – some companies are travelling down from as far away as Newcastle to do voluntary work for the park.)
- The Lovell St pond is coming back and work has started. A new and better viewing platform is going to cost approximately 2k.
- Rosemary's memorial bench should arrive tomorrow, and will be installed in a few months. It will need flagstones etc installed, which will take time to organise. Another bench is coming for the Friends' picnic garden, plus another one down the line as someone else wants to buy one.
- Dave said a lot of what Council and FRP do is visible, a lot invisible. Dave wished to "share some of my world". The biggest problem for him this year has been the toilets. He has spent a lot of time looking

down holes, but has now got to the “bottom” of it (!). There are structural problems and behavioural problems. People keep putting in whole toilet rolls, sanitary items, clothes (!) etc down the loo. But investigations also found tree roots growing into the pipes. £5,000 has been spent underground for something nobody can see from the surface. CCTV was taken of pipes, tree roots cut, the pipe lined, then pipes reprofiled as they were flowing the wrong way: all this has been going on behind closed doors. He will be meeting the cleaning company to try and find a toilet roll holder that kids won't stand on and break. He wants to go back to single sheet tracing paper as was everywhere in schools 40 years ago...! Or something anyway, where people can't put a whole roll in one go down the toilet.

- The Lodge has needed repairs to the lead on the roof.
- In total £10,000 of building work is happening around the park (including money spent on the toilets and Lodge roof).
- Fire sealant from the café basement storage area was found to be missing during an inspection.
- The park depot is getting new doors as some are rotten, others are having repairs, adjustments made.
- This is all “little stuff” but adds up money wise.
- Dave will also be getting new planks for six benches in the park. The Council are using a new style of bench with oiled planks of wood now rather than painted green benches as floodwater gets under paint and causes benches to rot.
- Dave has also allocated £1,200 to removing graffiti in the war memorial. Hopefully that graffiti was a one-off and the perpetrator has now moved on. (There was similar graffiti in other areas of York around the same time.)
- Dave referred to the project sheet he and Abigail keep as to where everything is at. They will continue to liaise about all the jobs on the list.
- He is still working on acquiring additional doves for the dovecote. The pest control company he has been working with say they can get the doves, but they then have to lock them in for six weeks to get them established, so they need someone to feed and water them but let the existing doves come and go, which is a bit of logistical issue. But Dave is now feeling confident they can get it sorted.
- The same pest control company can also probably supply and deliver a grass spray to deter the geese. (The spray is harmless but makes the grass taste nasty to geese thus deters them from eating it and wanting to be in the park.) The geese are currently eating grass everywhere, all over the park, including areas they have never been to before. FRP need to discuss where the geese are eating most, where therefore would be best for the pest company to spray, run some trials. Spraying will need to be done once a month or so if successful.
  - ACTION: FRP goose team to discuss the best areas to be sprayed.
- Val asked about funding for this? Dave thinks FRP shouldn't pay for it, this helps keep FRP's reputation protected from any pro-geese lobbying or possible social media abuse etc. Therefore the council should/will do it.
- General discussion about geese followed. Where else in York are there goose populations? – Esplanade, Tower Gardens. Basically anywhere where there is water and grass in combination.
- Abigail said the goose team has lots more volunteers now as the situation has got so bad.
- Regarding using the lasers (as were used previously by the goose team, another harmless method of making the park unwelcoming to geese): Jenny from the Council says people will need to start from the beginning, i.e. everyone will need to retrain to use them. Jenny will do an induction, this is a prerequisite for insurance. Jenny will arrange to meet with the goose team.
  - ACTION: goose team to liaise with Jenny for training and induction with the lasers.
- Question: are we allowed to use the lasers if the park is open? No. This led to a question about locking up time, as there is only a short “lasering” window now when it is dusk and the park is shut - e.g. it is fine at the moment at 5.30, but soon it will be completely dark by then. Dave replied that soon the park

will shut at 4-4.30pm, once the clocks change, then stay at that time until February, which should give the goose team enough opportunity to work.

- ACTION: Dave will update FRP on goose matters as things progress.
- Val asked for an update on £500 offered to FRP to help with the goose issue. Abigail confirmed the donor is happy to proceed but FRP haven't received the money yet. This money could be spent on other options, e.g new lasers, decoys, if Dave is now going to fund the grass-spraying.
- The current population of swans seems to be deterring the geese somewhat so should be encouraged to stay – perhaps by removing the fence on the island so they can nest there. (Since the fence doesn't deter the geese like it's supposed to.)
- The goose poo sweeper is only coming about once a week when someone "has time". People are encouraged to keep reporting goose poo problems to the Council to pressure them to send the machine more often. Geese aren't dangerous but the poo does become a hazard when it's blocking paths to wheelchairs, prams etc and it will have a negative effect on FRP income if e.g. providers of events stop coming. (e.g. No one wants to do pilates if the railed gardens are covered in goose poo.)
- Jenny may get work place volunteer teams to fill gaps where fencing has been lost to try and keep geese out of the railed gardens.
- The only real solution to the geese is a cull but this cannot be done as it would upset too many people.
- People ask why FRP are selling duck food – because this means people end up feeding it to the geese. But bread gives birds angel wing, diarrhoea etc so it's better that the birds eat healthier options. However, plenty of people still feeding the birds bread, this seems to be a losing battle.
- There have been reports of a few mutilated small animals around the park but the culprit is unknown – fox, person, cat? Anyone reporting injured birds or animal to Abigail is told to get in touch with the RSPCA.
- **Trees.** Dave was in the park with the council tree officer. The trees are under stress from a variety of sources – the chestnuts have bleeding canker, sycamores and maple have honey fungus, so more will need to come down. There is also ash dieback. The holly trees on the Cameron Grove entrance bank have a fungal infection. Dave – we need a five year plan to plant trees.
- Christine expressed concerns about the woodland as it is getting thinner and thinner. Hard to refill it as the old trees are slim and tall so there is no room for new trees to go, and the height of the old trees can't be reduced in order to balance them with younger ones. The ash trees have been deliberately trimmed to an unusual shape which doesn't help them flourish. Christine asked could we plant another woodland in a different spot – so as one comes down, another one is ready? All trees in the park are 100 years old or so as all were planted at the same time. The best spot would be outside of the flood wall but this isn't really an option as it would mean taking over the football field!
- Dave: Terry Avenue gates – there has been a complaint about the condition they are in. It has been 20 years since any work was last done on them. (e.g. skaters have removed some of the spikes in order to climb over the railings.) So some repairs will be done.
- Dave: Semi circular crescent flower beds need replanting and planning as they are so overgrown, mostly with nettles. This will be a priority over the cascade as the crescent beds are close to and detract from the Friends/ sensory gardens, long borders, dovecote etc. This will hopefully be resolved next year. Stu asked about beech hedges in that area as there are issues. Dave doesn't want to pull the hedge out. Dave will involve the gardeners in discussion about what to do.
- Japanese knotweed: A man was in doing some fairly aggressive spraying this week, but he wasn't looking on both sides of the park hedges and kept missing bits, despite having been provided with a detailed map. However, Stu was around to assist on this occasion (in his own voluntary time). Knotweed is in the woods but this is hard to find amongst the nettles – and can't be weeded as don't want to disturb/ risk spreading the knotweed. The knotweed contractor will come back in spring.

- The systems for gardening, general park maintenance by council teams and knotweed are not connected up – people cutting and composting the knotweed who shouldn't. This has happened three times or so in the past year, whereas it never did before when the park had permanent gardeners.
- Dave was thanked for coming to the AGM.

**Meeting adjourned at 8.30pm**