

## Friends of Rowntree Park AGM Minutes Thursday 12th October 2023

**Present:** Abigail Gaines, Cath Mortimer, Stu Small, Christine Banham, Pie Waller, Dave Meigh (CYC), Rebecca Dodgson, Kay Guppy, Jane Hutt, Jane McKay, Ed Woollard, Agnes Szechy, Maria Gimeno, Meg Spreckley, John Gilham

**Apologies:** Tom and Val Punchard, Johnny Hayes, Beryl Long.

### **1. Introduction and Welcome – Abigail Gaines**

Everyone introduced themselves.

### **2. Chair's Report: See Appendix A**

Cath Mortimer gave the annual chair's report. **Key Points:** It has been a busy year with many new and exciting projects such as Make Space for Girls (research for which began in 2021). There have also been several challenges such as poorly managed council areas (with the exception of new wildflower beds by the dovecotes) and unnecessary closures due to the ponds flooding and installed pumps not functioning correctly (repairs to the electrics have been conducted). The final accounts will be available at the next meeting in January and will be checked by an independent accountancy firm before Christmas, ready for trustee approval in December. The financial year finishes too close to the AGM now that finances are more complicated. The 2022-23 financial year was budgeted to come in at a loss, so the accounts are 3K in deficit. This is to use up reserves in line with Charity Commission guidelines.

### **3. Question: Volunteer Hours Logging**

*Litter hours – should volunteers still be noting them as no one has asked for them this year? Answer: Yes. Two new litter leads are about to take over who will be keeping records. The information is useful. A return to an online form for submission is envisaged.*

### **4. Question: City of York Council – can we get them to do anything more?**

Abigail explained the CYC structure *for parks: strategy vs ops vs ECO team and the limited services the council can offer (mowing, hedge-cutting, keeping play equipment safe, locking up). The new council has been left with a large deficit so there is no money. It is therefore unlikely (according to the Micklegate councillors) that Jenny Lee from the ECO team (who led groups of workplace volunteers in the park) will be replaced as there is a recruitment freeze (NB Dave Meigh contradicted this later: he was not present for this discussion). FRP can only raise limited funds from events and membership as income from the cafe and the tennis courts goes elsewhere. The park is undergoing "managed decline" and FRP will have to raise all money for new plants from now on. It is important to keep pressure on the council and raise awareness of the situation.*

### **5. Lodge update: See Appendix B**

John Gilham gave an update on behalf of Johnny Hayes and the Lodge team. The full text is in Appendix B.

#### **Key points:**

- Last week's public exhibition and meeting at Southlands Church was a success, with 150 attending during the day and 55 coming to the meeting. Everyone could view the architect plans and history display boards. Details are on the FRP website. Responses were very positive and there were constructive comments. Rachael Maskell MP attended and was supportive.
- People are encouraged to complete the online survey regarding the Lodge development. This is different to the survey filled in a few years ago.
- The lift will now go inside the passageway at the back of the café between the café and the kitchen rather than being fully external. This has been agreed with Explore. Access will only be from the rear outside, not through the café, to meet food hygiene regulations.
- A planning application should be submitted to CYC in the next fortnight.
- Funding – capital works will be 250-400K depending on the level of spec. The Community Ownership Fund administered by the Department for Levelling Up have awarded 10K as an enabling grant and invited FRP to

make a full application which is likely (though not guaranteed) to be successful. We will put in bid for 300K maximum. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has also just offered a 15K grant.

- Sincere thanks from all on the Lodge team and the Friends of Rowntree Park to Johnny Hayes for all his hard work.

## 6. Dave Meigh CYC update (Public Realms)

**Dave wished to say thank you to the FRP, as the park wouldn't be what it is without us.**

Various updates: 4 original **doves** have been joined by 12 new ones from Liverpool. They all had to be locked in for 6 weeks to settle and were fed and watered daily by a contact of South Bank Pest Control. Hopefully the doves will breed in newly built boxes.

- **Lodge** – Dave has also been attending meetings. He is pleased the exhibition went well as he was unable to attend. The project needs to get “the great and the good” to sign support letters so it's excellent that Rachael Maskell MP was there. Two issues that have been barriers to progress: firstly, the lift which has been through various iterations and the construction of which cannot compromise Explore. Secondly the asbestos between the ceiling of the main café and the first floor of the Lodge. It will be taken out from above to not disturb the café and mean it only has to close for the bare minimum time in Jan/Feb 2024.
- **Question:** *There was talk at the last meeting of containing (encapsulating) rather than removing asbestos as this would be cheaper – what about that? Reply: CYC believe it is best to draw a line under the asbestos completely and remove it. This means it future-proofs the property and won't hinder any future alterations, and the asbestos won't be disturbed by mistake.*
- **EA Compound/Butcher Terrace Field** - Dave has been digging holes in the Butcher Terrace field (where the EA compound was during flood defence construction works) to do soil sampling, to see how much debris is still around and whether the field is fit to be returned for use. The good news is that they found little material of significance. They checked 9 random locations across the field and found a distinct structure in soil between old soil and the sandy new soil. They found a few thin bits of plastic and a few bits of glass. (Gardening lead Stu has removed a lot of glass from the field.) Dave will repeat the survey with Stu next week. There is still some paperwork to do before the field is handed back to CYC. EA also will put up goalposts in a North-South direction so balls are not kicked into the wildlife area. Only one area of grass seed has not taken.

**Action: DM to meet SS for soil sampling.**

- **Trees** – of the new ones planted by the EA (to replace trees that were cut down for the flood defence works), about five haven't survived, so they will replant these. There is a 5-year warranty on what goes in. There is a pine near the helmet sculpture and four maples towards the totem pole that need replacements. EA contractors will come in January or March to replant if not flooded. Some trees were also put in the wrong place then moved but they need to be moved again: one cypress and one chestnut too close to the zip wire in the play area. EA accept their responsibility and that they have failed in this regard. The poor condition of the trees is due to lack of maintenance when it was dry this summer.

**Action: EA to replace and move trees as required.**

- **CYC Gras Cutting** - The new council keen on reducing grass cutting. The North side city cutters were more experienced than the operatives on the south side so they have swapped some teams round so hopefully the cutting will be better from now on. Dave will do a mapping exercise on what the FRP want cutting in the park and what can't be cut.
- **Question:** *is this for environment or economical reasons? Answer: Environmental (but it also saves money.) The council will make public announcements e.g. “no-mow May.” Some areas of the park will still need to be mowed – e.g. areas used for events and activities such as the arena and the railed gardens, and no one wants nettles in the play areas. Dave acknowledged this year has been a real struggle in terms of ops and mowing. Stu offered that if FRP know areas that won't be mowed, we can seed them with wildflowers etc. Council can have a strategy but all on the ground need to be informed, so teams can plan and work accordingly.*

**ACTION: Mapping of areas in the park to be mown or left.**

- *Question: who has stripped back bog area? DM no idea.*  
**Action: Iain from ECO team will investigate.**
  - **Eco Team** - AG expressed concerns about Jenny Lee not being replaced. DM thinks she will be replaced eventually but can't say when. DM is getting permission to recruit a tree guy, tractor driver, play area inspection and operative posts. There are frontline posts so there isn't a blanket recruitment freeze.
  - *Question from Stu Small – how do we liaise with Kevin in Ops re: green waste? There are green binbags everywhere. Dave said gardeners need to take to a skip in the compound. SS requested wheelie bins to help carry the bags across.*  
**Action: CYC to supply bin for gardeners to transport waste in.**
  - **Geese** – *question - did grass spraying happen, as there have been no updates? The team can't currently do any lasering owing to the inconvenient park closure times. Dave admitted he forgot to order more spraying in the spring.*  
**ACTION: DM said goose team should meet him early February 2024 to agree where to spray and how to monitor the effects.**
  - The goose egg oiling was a success as there were no goslings so this must be repeated in the spring. **ACTION: DM to order goose egg oiling at the appropriate time.** The swans haven't nested despite railings to the island being removed.
  - **Beck Walls** - *SS asked a question about the beck wall repairs/shoring up. DM replied that it's getting too expensive for current budgets. 120K to take down and put in a steel piled replacement for just a short stretch of it at the Butcher Terrace end. The wall has been checked – foundations are "interesting" at best, with some roots growing through. The main movement of the wall is outwards – it has already been buttressed. The weight of water in the park during flooding is therefore a bigger risk than the weight of water pushing in from the beck. The park will have to continue to close when the river height reaches 3.10m instead of 3.4m.*
7. **Committee:** There is no committee to elect as now key people are paid as part of the charity and FRP also have trustees. AG stressed that FRP always need new people, so there was a call for general volunteers.
8. AG and CM thanked everyone for their support for the FRP, and invited people to stay and chat to anyone they wanted to.

**ACTION: Everyone is encouraged to put in blue Tesco tokens to vote for Make Space for Girls between now and mid-January.**

**ACTION: Dates for the next meetings: Time 7-8.30pm**

25th Jan 2024

18th April 2024

4th July 2024

7th Nov 2024 (AGM)

Action	Details	Who
Volunteer hour logging	Revisit with volunteer leads on best way to do this.	Agnes/Abigail
Butcher Terrace Field	Stu to join Dave Meigh to do soil sampling to see if the field is good enough of a state to have fencing remove.	Dave Meigh & Stu Small
Dead Trees planted by EA	Dave Meigh to continue to liaise with EA to get these replaced	Dave Meigh
Mapping of park for mowing/general operations maintenance	Dave Meigh (or Ops) to meet with FRP (Abigail/Stu) and communicate plan	Dave Meigh (or Ops) meet/communicate with Stu & Abigail
Cutting of Lovell Street entrance - find out who did this!	Iain eco Team looking into this	Iain Dunn
Gardening volunteer green waste issue	Dave Meigh to sort bin into compound and get plastic wheelbarrows for volunteers	Dave Meigh
Geese - spraying grass	Dave Meigh to meet Goose Team Feb to agree plan	Dave Meigh
Geese - Eggs	Dave Meigh to order oiling for early spring and communicate when happening/happened.	Dave Meigh
Tesco Blue Tokens	Vote for FRP in Tesco until Mid Jan!	All of us!

## Appendix A

### Chair's Report

#### The work of the Friends of Rowntree Park 2022-23

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 2022-23, the Friends contributed to these aims through a huge and varied range of activities. 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. groups working on Rosemary's Sensory garden, the Long Borders, Rose Garden, Friends Garden, Rockery and the Wildlife areas). Craft and nature sessions for adults and children have contributed to our work on mental health and wellbeing. Other key volunteering activities include bird feeding, litter-picking, and helping at events. In addition to projects resulting in craft installations and the Art in the Park display, the new Make Space for Girls project has promoted equity in the use of our park and has gained substantial public recognition. We're also glad to report that the Lodge Project (creating a community facility in the former park-keeper's flat, above the cafe) is now back in action, with Johnny Hayes leading a project group; working with staff from the City of York Council and from Explore (the Library), the team has made good progress, and will shortly submit a planning application.

We continue to work with the council to report issues and suggest improvements; this year, key themes have been the unnecessary flood episodes, the poor upkeep of council-related areas and the timing of night-time gate closures. This summer, we said farewell to Jenny Lee (our contact on the ECO team at CYC), who had been a stalwart supporter of the park and of the Friends. 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. Members pay a small annual membership fee and they are kept in touch with all aspects of the Friends' work with a monthly newsletter, as well as by our comprehensive website and lively social media presence.

The charity has a paid charity manager, Abigail Gaines; she works part-time, looking after the volunteers and our 1150 members, as well as coordinating our wide-ranging activities. Those leading the Forest School and gardening strands receive payment towards their work and we have recently started paying for a few hours a week of admin/finance help. We thank them all for their hard work, often going far beyond the call of duty.

As a charity, our trustees have the job of overseeing the work of the Friends, making sure that we are working legally and responsibly. We meet regularly to work on various aspects of governance, and each trustee has oversight, as a 'link trustee', for one or more key areas of the Friends' activity. This year, one of our trustees Stephen Dunthorne sadly died; Stephen made a significant impact over two years, specifically working on strategy and on the Lodge project, and he will be missed. Three new trustees joined the group and a list of our current trustees is on the website.

The charity has a financial year that finishes at the end of September, so in the short time before the AGM, only preliminary draft accounts for 2022/23 can be prepared. After further checking, including the use of an external accountant, the final accounts will be approved at the December trustees' meeting, then submitted to the Charity Commission and provided for information at the next committee meeting. This year, we have received grants for specific projects from Yorkshire Water, Benenden Health, Belfry Small Grants fund (via Two Ridings Community Foundation), The Police and Crime Commissioner's Fund, and the Micklegate Ward; this resulted in an income of £47,153 for 'restricted funds'; some of these funds (£15000) are for purchasing permanent play equipment, and others for running a variety of projects over the next few years. During the year, we also concluded spending the funds relating to a large grant that we had received from LNER.

Apart from the grants received, our income was again strong (about £30000), largely coming from membership, events and Forest School, although merchandise sales, duck food sales and donations are also important contributors. On the expenditure side, the largest element is paying our 'staff' for admin and for delivering sessions (£16193), although fees for insurance (£513) and for platforms relating to accounting, membership and payment are

inevitably significant sums (£1718). £1140 was spent in '22-23 to support the initial stages of the Lodge project; trustees are mindful of the impact of the project on the ongoing activities of the Friends and, fortunately, the Community Ownership Fund has recently offered significant financial support for this current stage. Focusing on the unrestricted funds alone, there was a small operational deficit (around £3000) relating mainly to replacing equipment; this was planned in the budget, and we have appropriate reserves. Overall, the trustees feel that the Friends' finances are looking healthy.

We look forward to a challenging but exciting year. 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)

Cath Mortimer

Chair, Friends of Rowntree Park

## Appendix B

### LODGE PROJECT - PROGRESS SO FAR

**NOTES for FORP AGM 12 October 2023 Johnny Hayes/ John Gilham for the Lodge Project Team.**

**I should say first of all that Johnny Hayes, who drafted the bulk of this update is unable to be here and he has asked me, as a member of the Project Team, to read it for him.**

- So, I'm speaking on behalf of the Lodge Project Team .We have all been working for the last 18 months or so to help realise the Friends vision for the presently empty former Park Keepers Lodge above the café: to be put to good use in the future and not be left empty as it has been for the last 6 years. As you all know, I'm sure, it was formerly the Park Keeper's living accommodation.
- The Lodge Project Team is made up of about a dozen interested people, with various skills and experience to offer (who are also Members of the Friends of Rowntree Park) and who are working for and with the FRP Trustees and staff. We have a Trustee Liaison person (Lucy McDonough) who is part of the team. Johnny Hayes is the overall Project Manager.
- Our collective aim is to deliver the Lodge Project on behalf of the Friends of Rowntree Park with a well restored and well developed and equipped public space that will become a much loved part of this much loved park. We work on the practical side of developing the Lodge as a new community resource. Also to help raise funds to develop the space and also to sustain it moving forward. The plan is for the doors to open in early 2025. We anticipate the Lodge will become a major asset to the Park and the local community, by providing a space that will be of benefit both to the Local Community generally and be a well used resource for all. But in particular it will also provide the Friends of Rowntree Park with a much-needed home in the Park.
- Last week a public Exhibition and Meeting was held at Southlands Church on Thursday 28th September. This was the Lodge Project Team's main public consultation meeting on behalf of the FRP and involved a lot of work by all members of the project team. The event was very well attended with 150 people attending the Exhibition during the day and 55 attendees at the public meeting in the evening.
- The exhibition and meeting provided an opportunity for people to see what has been planned and for the public to make comment on those plans. Full architect's plans and elevations were displayed. We wanted to collect people's views and respond to those views wherever possible. The Exhibition details can be seen on the FRP website. The exhibition gave a background and history of the park and the FRP. Also some background to the negotiations with Explore and City of York Council (the Council own the building) and shows what the Lodge will look like and suggests how it might be used.
- The responses at the exhibition were overwhelmingly positive and the comments were constructive. Among others the local MP attended the public meeting and made supportive comments to FORP afterwards.
- We have recorded feedback on the day from the public but we have also launched an online survey on the FORP website which we encourage you all to complete if you haven't already.
- Last Thursday was a milestone as it was the major public announcement of the plans developed over the last 18 months. These were based on the excellent 2020 business plan that was put together mainly by Simon Town in

the wake of the proposed COYC holiday let idea. This Business plan has formed the basis for the team to negotiate with City of York Council about the Lodge being leased to the FRP on 99-year lease on a peppercorn rent. We have already received Heads of Terms from the Council which confirm that intention.

- One of the main aspects of the plan is a lift to all floors to provide disabled access and for anyone else with reduced mobility. It would be fair to say that much of the Project Team's work over the past months has been to determine a position for the lift which minimises the effect on the Explore café while providing an acceptable external appearance which will meet conservation and heritage considerations. The discussion on lift size has swayed to and fro over, literally, millimetres.
- We have also over the months had numerous meetings with Council Officers and Local Councillors.
- So, having agreed with Explore the position of the lift and commissioned and received the various surveys, including a parking survey which Stu has done, surveys which need to accompany a planning application the aim is to submit the application to the Council in the next few weeks, for approval.
- The major source of funding will be through fund raising. The cost of the capital works is between £250k and £400k for either a basic development or a more aspirational development with green energy, quality fittings and furniture that will reflect the quality of the arts and crafts architecture. We have an initial cost estimate from a quantity Surveyor to support those figures.
- It is hoped the largest source of funding will be the Community Ownership Fund which is a £150 million fund administered by the Department for levelling up. On the 27th September we were informed that the COF had awarded the FRP an additional grant of £10k. This is an enabling grant for applications that need additional short-term funding to realise their long term aims. Really good news! It gives us some confidence in putting together a bid for the £300k max grant. These funds will be used to pay for architect's fees and the other reports needed to get through planning.
- Our stage one initial application for the £300K grant was successful which means, not that the sum is already guaranteed, but that we can move forward to make a full application in January 2024, all going well.
- Work to gather the necessary information to support the main application is already in hand. Abigail has prepared a draft analysis of the Friends of Rowntree Park's aims and the work that Friends already do in multiple areas for the local community, including for those most deprived in our area. The document also points forward to how the Lodge project will enable the Friends to expand the work they do. All the work of Friends, staff and volunteers for the park and those who use the park are a major plus in our ability to get grant funding. Everyone involved deserves the warmest praise.
- We can also announce that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have just in the last few days said that they would like to give the Lodge project a £15,000 pound grant.
- Johnny wants to emphasise that last week was a major milestone for the Lodge Project, with the confirmation of the £10K grant, the offer of the Rowntree grant, and the exhibition. The exhibition was in effect a public announcement of progress in advance of submitting the plans to go to COYC for planning approval.
- Finally, I have to say, and this wasn't in Johnny's script, that Johnny Hayes has been absolutely indefatigable as Project Manager. We would never have got to this stage on either planning or funding without his commitment, his enthusiasm, his ideas, and his grasp of every detail. He deserves his brief holiday.



