



Friends of Rowntree Park AGM Minutes 14th November 2024

Present: Lucy Brown, Stu Small, Val & Tom Punchard, Rose Berl, Meg Spreckley, Abigail Gaines, Rebecca Dodgson, Dave Meigh, Ed Woollard, Cath Mortimer, Kay Guppy, Jan Kingdom, Lou, Gina, Agnes Szechy, Jane McKay, Liz Boyes Watson, Shelagh Edmond, Anthony and Margaret May, Matt (?), June Hutt.

Apologies: Christine Banham, Pie Waller.

1. **Welcome and introductions** – Abigail introduced key FRP people to everyone present including four trustees.

2. Chair's Report

Ed presented the chair's report. See Appendix A.

Question about reserves: is 6 months running costs enough as opposed to a year? FRP is acting on advice of a trustee who works for several charities and that from the Charity Commission. Our running costs are mainly things like insurance, online platforms. FRP don't currently employ staff (everyone works freelance) or have any buildings to pay bills for. It isn't just the Charity Commission that doesn't like charities sitting on large sums of money in reserve: it is also a disadvantage when applying for grants as financial need should be demonstrated.

ACTION: FRP to issue clear reserves policy - see Appendix B. Trustee Becci Blues happy to be a contact for anyone with further questions on the policy.

Question: how much money did FRP make last year? Figures in financial report in Appendix A. The bank account currently has approximately 47K in it, of which only 15K max is unrestricted.

3. Lodge update

Lucy Brown gave an update on the Lodge. A year ago Lucy took over from Johnny Hayes to be in charge of the Lodge project (temporarily). She summarised what the project involves, i.e. bringing the two top floors of the building back into community use. The work now has planning permission so work has been ongoing to put together a large grant application. This was intended to go to the Community Ownership Fund from the Department of Levelling Up. A FRP expression of interest was successful and the core team were working with the fund representatives to put together a full application. However, by the time planning permission was obtained the next round of funding got pulled as the general election was called and the fund halted. No word is reopening so work has taken a pause over the summer but they are now looking at applying to the Heritage Lottery fund instead. This is a better fit and the Lottery has funded the park before during its renovations in 2000. Before submitting an application, FRP also have to agree a lease with the City of York Council as they have no contractual arrangement for the building. Negotiations are still ongoing. FRP will first have to submit an expression of interest to the Lottery: this should happen in a couple of weeks. Hopefully work done on the COF application can be transferred across to the new grant forms. If the expression of interest is successful, the earliest opportunity for a full application would be in early 2025.

FRP members originally involved in the project ('lodge team') as part of the community expressed disappointment that they have been left out of the loop about progress and some doubt trustees' commitment. They stated they haven't received an email update since Johnny Hayes stood down a year ago. The Lodge has now been empty for years. They worry that nothing will happen before the planning permission expires (3 years). Trustees confirmed their commitment and said that all activity over the past few months has had to be left to professionals, e.g. architects and consultants preparing paperwork for the planning permission or solicitors negotiating the lease and all of this has taken a long time. And in reality there hasn't been anything to communicate other than what has been shared in the FRP members newsletter. The last larger meeting of the group was hosted by Simon Town in Feb 2024 following Johnny's departure. This highlighted the situation and the next steps. Since that time a core team of Lucy Brown, Simon Town, John Gray and Mike Hobbs have been involved with the intention to involve the wider team once there was something to report/involve others in. Ed and Lucy promised to improve communication with the original lodge team and that once the funding applications are in there will be a lot of opportunities for the community to be involved as volunteer time will also contribute to match-funding.

ACTION: An email to the original lodge team to be sent in the next week.

Question: is the business plan up to date as the world has changed since the original one was written (e.g. post-Covid)?

Yes, it has been updated, and may need to be updated again before the Lottery application.

There were questions about the Lodge being a separate charity or entity from the park. Yes it will be somewhat separate and it will be self-sustaining in time. It aims to generate income for the park but cannot take away from the park and its core aims. Ed stressed that a lot of the project does align with the park aims. FRP will be glad to have storage and meeting space indoors, particularly during winter months.

Dave Meigh added: CYC had all the asbestos removed from the Lodge earlier in 2024. There is also a minor leak below the emergency exit which is causing cracks to appear on the café wall. This is being addressed.

Dave thinks now that the asbestos is removed he can grant FRP access to the building. It has no water supply and not much in the way of electrics and the rooms are little more than empty shells, but there is a clean, dry floor and the room above the café is quite warm. If FRP activity were to start up there this would mean that we would be cover the clause for work to start within 3 years after planning permission is granted. There would be definite benefits in giving life to the building.

ACTION: Dave and Abigail will discuss FRP Lodge access further.

4. Charity manager update

Abigail advised everyone to read the FRP website and newsletters for relevant information about what is happening in the park.

5. General volunteering opportunities

Abigail encouraged people to recruit further volunteers for the park as we don't have enough - spreading the word would help. We have just a few people taking a lot of responsibility and it's not sustainable. Abigail volunteers about 20 hours some week in addition to the 10 paid hours. Anyone interested in gardening was encouraged to speak to Stu.

6. Dave Meigh from CYC Public Realms Update

Abigail and Dave meet regularly to liaise with each other about what needs doing in the park. Dave updated on the following:

6.1 Water. Never had a year like this before. The park was shut for a long time over the winter. What have CYC done in response?

A lot of the problems were caused by rain rather than river flooding, but the Ouse did flood the park at least once. The solution is to drop the level in the lake for the winter. People in the park will see there is quite a lot of exposed concrete on the edges of the lake now. There is an outlet at one end of the lake that flows into a pump house chamber in the woods, and from there into the beck. CYC have taken the top of the outlet pipe off so they now have a bigger sump. This means the pump will start pumping water out earlier so it shouldn't rise up and flood the lakeside paths. Also, becksideside CYC have put gabions in, which are essentially metal cages full of stones, so water doesn't erode the beck banks. CYC have also put a drain in at the play area end of the lake. This goes across at a higher level than before and will get water out of that area quickly. CYC have also washed out all the drains in the Mercury statue/ Crescent Beds area of the park and another tanker jetter is coming in next Thursday to finish clearing out the drains along the Long Borders central avenue and the events space, as well as another gully in the site compound and Butcher Terrace field. All this should mean that the water trying to get into the lake will clear through much quicker. Thankfully, it has been much drier this year than last. A new pump was installed in the wood last summer but it failed after two months. This has now been replaced by the manufacturer.

Question: is it still the case that the beck wall won't be replaced? Answer: "Never say never" but probably not.

The beck wall goes from the car park round to Butcher Terrace field and was built in the 1920s or 1930s. It is a multi-layered construction and leaks a bit but these leaks aren't too significant. The foundations are "various" and have tree roots growing under them. It wouldn't be fit for purpose under today's Environment Agency regulations. Dave has bid to CYC for money for the wall to be rebuilt, which was rejected last year. He is bidding again this year, but for a more open set of projects. There is a CYC meeting tonight about the budget. Generally there will be more cuts, so there is unlikely to be any money available for the park. The beck wall being compromised means that the park now has to shut at a lower river level (3.1m) which means it closes more often. This means FRP have to cancel events, gardening, forest school etc which loses the charity income. The wall is unlikely to fail completely but CYC/ the park can't be liable were someone to be injured in a "random tsunami".

Question about the drain from the café which is open - Jan has put chicken wire over it as a temporary fix.

Question: is the council going to dredge out and clean the lake properly? Answer: this was never the intention, despite what was said in the Press. Just the most pressing debris was removed. FRP do not have enough volunteers to take on the maintaining the lakes so it is a council responsibility. But if FRP and CYC work together, FRP can probably supply volunteers to help at specific times. CYC need a plan/ strategy for this and would need to supervise. Dave said that the excavator that came to do the work actually got minimal material out as leaves etc will rot down. The lake is actually quite healthy as it is full of fish, frogs, toads etc. The green growth on the water doesn't look good in summer: the proposal is to put in bales of barley straw to reduce nutrient levels next summer to combat this. Workplace volunteers can maybe help with the lake but it's quite sporadic as to when these come in.

Dave plans for some painting work on the lower part of the lodge, particularly its southern aspect, porch, timber etc. Toilets: there has been petty vandalism in the gents again – the

ceiling was attacked by a stick, Dave was worried these were asbestos tiles but they weren't and a repair is being sorted. Floodwater makes paint peel off the toilet walls, so it constantly needs redoing, and will be done again. For this reason park benches are now being made of oiled rather than painted wood. Six benches have been replanked recently. Winter maintenance – the yew hedge needs coming down by 70%, it will look drastic/ grim when done but it hasn't been cut for 10 years. It is full of brambles that people can't get to. The hedge along the Long Borders will also be cut back rather than just having the tops cut off it. This will increase the width of borders so there will be more room for planting and the daffodils will shine through.

Green flag application – Dave made the hard decision not to apply for this for Rowntree Park last January, the first time the park hadn't been entered in 20 years.

Dave wasn't confident the park would pass in May given how behind flooding made everything. He will be entering the park again for 2025. Green Flag is judged on a management plan and a site visit. The visit could be anytime from March onwards but is usually in May. Volunteers were very disappointed the park was not entered this year as they felt their hard work wasn't rewarded. The last report really praised FRP. CYC priorities must be the Crescent Beds and the Cascade Area, which were mentioned in the last Green Flag report. The park doesn't need to be perfect to get the award but it has to reach a minimum standard. There are several areas scored and Rowntree Park because of the work of FRP volunteers will score very highly for community activity.

Gates – Dave has bid for money to restore the war memorials on the Terry Avenue gates and lychgate. Has briefed Jenny Kent and representatives from the York Civic trust on his proposals. The Terry Avenue gates just need cleaning up and painting, with some ornamentation restored. The lychgate needs more work: the foundations have moved in a century of flooding, there are missing and rotting timbers, and plaster is falling off the mock Tudor ends where doves are.

The doves have been a big success but a peregrine falcon has been going in and decapitating them. So the doves may have to be locked in for a while. At least three have been killed. Numbers were up to 28 after a successful breeding season.

Abigail mentioned other things she has discussed with Dave (things 'on the list' for CYC attention):

- There is a picnic bench to go in Rosemary's garden to still be installed. There is Japanese knotweed in the Crescent Beds that needs regular treating.
- There is a need for a CYC policy on scattering ashes in the park. Dave and Abigail have had some more enquiries about this recently. FRP are keen for ashes not to be scattered in flower beds where volunteers work, and certainly not in large piles. They also do not want people leaving shrines of non-biodegradable items like balloons. Dave is talking to a councillor about donations and memorials on Thursday to put out a public statement on these things. FRP were under the impression the view was no ashes in the park but Dave was less clear.
- Abigail also has requested more "dogs on lead" and "do not feed the geese" signs.
- Abigail mentioned geese: There are the usual issues. The sweeper is not coming often enough to clear away the poo. The goose volunteer team has been disbanded after initial success as the park closing times have become so irregular/ unsuitable with Gough and Kelly in charge of locking up. As long as the eggs are oiled though the population will not grow any larger.

Question: can the egg oiler distinguish between swan and goose eggs? (Only one of the swans' eggs hatched this year.) Answer: Don't know!

Question about the cascade area: two members had clear ideas/ concerns about the state of the planting/overgrowth in this area:

cutch grass, acers, brambles etc. It has been difficult to do any work on this area as it's not safe for most volunteer gardeners, the eco team took 14 months to replace Jenny, the work place community teams have been sporadic, and numbers doing community service are low. You need to be able to see across the park from the Richardson St entrance but the bushes have got too big. One tree has been felled. Now there are new eco team and ops staff in place there needs to be a reset as a service and CYC will have to come back to this area with clarity. They will try to meet with FRP volunteers for feedback. This area is a legacy of austerity and so many staffing cuts since 2010. It needs constant maintenance and this isn't possible.

Question: trees at the Cameron Grove entrance, three out of four new ones planted to replace the felled holly trees have been swamped by nettles and brambles. Dave said he would investigate.

ACTIONS:

- **FRP and CYC eco team to liaise about plans for the lake and cascade area (communicate with Margaret May).**
- **Dave and Abigail to discuss access to the Lodge for FRP.**
- **Dave to order new signs, submit Green Flag application, order goose egg oiling for the spring and look at new conifers planted at Cameron Grove entrance.**
- **Japanese knotweed to be treated.**
- **Doves to be locked in to prevent further killings?**
- **Painting work on Lodge and lychgate and toilets.**
- **CYC statement on scattering of ashes.**
- **Gate restoration if bid successful.**
- **Picnic bench to be installed in Rosemary's Sensory Garden**
- **Drain in Lodge garden?**
- **Barley hay for the lake next summer? A basic plan fro the lakes with the Eco Team?**

APPENDIX A: Chair's Report



THE FRIENDS OF ROWNTREE PARK

Chair's Report

The work of the Friends of Rowntree Park 2023-24

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

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

Over the year 2023-24, the Friends contributed to these aims through a huge and varied range of activities including:

Regular children's events such as:

- Weekly: Pre-school Forest School
- Monthly: Very Young Friends
- Weekly: Wild Ones nature youth group for teenage girls
- Monthly: Family Forest School

Other children's/family events:

- Easter Trail
- Halloween Event
- Festive Forest School
- Children's Christmas Crafts
- Autumn Art
- Make Space for Girls five-week programme of free events
- Scarecrow trail
- Autumn Fayre

Adult events:

- Wreath Making
- Christmas Crafts
- Various willow-weaving sessions
- History walks and talks
- Tropica DJ picnic event

We have also organised a range of outside providers to run events including woodwork sessions, nature writing, nature gatherings/wellbeing circle, sound baths, theatre and group social meet up/gatherings as well as children's birthday parties.

Gardening:

Volunteer gardening sessions four mornings of the week and ad hoc Saturdays. Working on Rosemary's Sensory Garden, the Long Borders, Rose Garden, Friends Garden, Pollinator Beds, Rockery and the Wildlife areas.

Other key volunteering activities include bird feeding, litter-picking, and helping at events.

Other projects:

- Art in the Park
- Remembrance Display

- Trailblazers Project (a range of history workshops and walks, boards, online survey, a children's book and also a tansy beetle sculpture - part of the city-wide trail).

Make Space for Girls In Rowntree Park project

Installation of equipment in May that we raised funds for - the area co-designed with teenage girls. Also, the five-week free programme of events and activities with around 400 girls involved.

Groups of girls were involved in the Trailblazer project and attended a range of sessions leading to a sculpture in the park representing a female York trailblazer.

Abigail also led related sessions for York International Women's Week, spoke at the Mansion House for International Women's day and at York Theatre for the Women of the World Show.

Won the "Best of the Best" award from Green Flag Awards for the 'Best Initiative to increase use of parks by women and girls' in November 2023.

Lodge Project

The Lodge Project Team continues to meet regularly and are currently looking at grant-making organisations for a large bid to support this project such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. Submission for a grant is likely to be made in early 2025. Work is also ongoing on our negotiations with the council on the lease and Heads of Terms are currently being agreed.

Big achievements/awards/wins through 2023-24

- Gardening: despite the park being underwater for 3 months, the volunteers adapted and the park looked great again!
- Green Flag "Best of the Best" award in Nov last year.
- New equipment installed linked to the MSFG project.
- New Welcome and History Boards

Community link with the council

We continue to work with the council to report issues and suggest improvements. This year, key themes have been flooding and communication between teams linked to flooding and also who does what in the park and when. Our main contact is Dave Meigh of Public Realms, but we also work with the Environment and Community Team who mainly support workplace volunteering in the park. Our Eco Team links are now Beki Hagger and Mel Elkan.

Rowntree Park wasn't entered for the Green Flag Award in 2024 but the aim is to enter in 2025.

Social Media Growth

In the past year, we have made significant strides in expanding our social media presence, which is vital for engaging with our community and promoting our activities.

- Facebook: From November 1, 2023, to November 1, 2024, we have increased our followers by 1.1k. This growth reflects our ongoing efforts to connect with our audience and share the positive impact of our initiatives.
- Instagram: Over the last 90 days, our content has reached 12.3k accounts. This impressive reach demonstrates the effectiveness of our social media in engaging a wider audience and raising awareness about the Friends of Rowntree Park.

These numbers not only highlight our growing influence but also provide an opportunity to further engage with our community. By continuing to enhance our social media presence, we can attract more volunteers, participants and members.

The charity

- 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 an 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. We have 1227 members at present.
- The charity has a paid charity manager, Abigail Gaines; she works part-time, looking after the volunteers and members as well as coordinating our wide-ranging activities and all the design and advertising. Those leading the Forest School and Gardening strands receive payment towards their work and we pay for a few hours a week of admin/finance help and also an accountant for our end-of-year accounts.
- As a charity, our trustees have the job of overseeing the work of the Friends, making sure that we are working legally and responsibly. Earlier this year Cath Mortimer stepped down as Chair of the Board of Trustees and recruitment is underway for a new Chair. As an interim measure the current Trustees have agreed to take on the role of Chair on a six-month rolling rota. Ed Woollard will be in the position of Chair until the end of March 2025.
- We currently have seven other Trustees and are looking for a new trustee to join our existing team .
- The Trustees 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.

Financial summary

The charity has a financial year that finishes at the end of September, and we currently only have draft figures for 2023-2024 as the external accountant is still working on the final reporting. Once received, the final accounts will be approved at the next available trustee meeting then submitted to the Charity Commission and provided for information at the next general meeting.

This year, we received £36,611 in 'restricted funds' grants for specific projects from the Community Ownership Fund, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Make It York (Trailblazers), the Police and Crime Commissioners Fund, Tesco Groundworks Stronger Starts, the National Lottery Community Fund and Benenden Health. There was £48,285 expenditure from restricted funds. This included grants that had been awarded in previous years such as approximately £15,000 on the new MSFG equipment. It also included £11,837 grant expenditure on the Lodge project.

Apart from the grants received, our income was just under £27,000, largely coming from membership and events, although merchandise sales, duck food sales and donations are also important contributors. Duck food income was down, partly due to the long closure of the park in the winter.

On the expenditure side, the largest element is paying our 'staff' for admin and facilitation of sessions/events (£19,944), and core running costs including fees for insurance (£548) and for online platforms relating to accounting, membership and payment are inevitably significant (£1,961).

Focusing on the unrestricted funds, there was a small operational deficit (around £1,702) in 2023-2024 - this was planned in the budget and was in fact lower than expected. We have reserves that cover this.

For the last few years we have been budgeting to make a loss, which may sound strange but we had managed to build up reserves before becoming a charity and before paying for people and systems. A charity is meant to only have minimal reserves (we are aiming for six months' running costs), so we have been using these up.

Moving forward we are predicting a loss of around £6.5k in October 2025 - this will take us into our reserves. Moving forward from Oct 2025, we need to look at ways to raise money and be more sustainable as we won't have a backlog of reserves. This may include relooking at membership fees, encouraging donations, trying to find grants that help with

running costs (not many of those exist), and continuing to make gardening more sustainable (which is a continuation of what we've been doing). Overall, the trustees feel that the Friends' finances are in a healthy place but with headroom to grow as the charity moves forward.

Change in leaders and thanks to:

Litter - thanks to Kate Lock and Meg Spreckley who took on the litter lead role over the last year. Meg will be continuing with this as the lead.

Bird Feeding - thank you to Vikki who has been overseeing this area, and we are grateful that Sue wants to continue with this role. No other volunteers are needed for this small area at present.

Gardening - thank you to Jan for overseeing the Tuesday gardening group and her continued resilience.

Events - thanks to Abigail and Christine who run a range of events through the year that are fundraisers for the FRP, volunteering a vast amount of their time. These include Christmas Wreaths, Halloween, Easter and the Autumn Fayre.

And thank you to all our volunteers who help make Rowntree Park what it is!

Looking ahead to 2025

In addition to continuing a range of our usual activities, some of the things scheduled worth note include:

- Continuation and growth of the Make Space for Girls project
- Starting to plan more for fundraising and strategy on how to make charity more sustainable
- Continuing to develop and grow partnerships

We look forward to a challenging but exciting year. To find out more, check out our website rowntreepark.org.uk or contact us via email: hello@rowntreepark.org.uk

Ed Woollard
Chair, Friends of Rowntree Park

APPENDIX B: Reserves Policy

Our charity reserves

In the years before coming a charity, we had built up a larger reserve than necessary or desirable, through successful fund-raising. Hence we wanted to reduce the reserves to a more appropriate level, by spending on our projects, equipment and materials.

In general, a charity's reserves should be:

- Not too high (i.e. withholding money unnecessarily – the money has been given for charitable benefit, to be spent 'within a reasonable time'. It could also suggest to grant givers that our charity may not truly need/deserve grants)
- Not too low (risky for the charity, in case there are unexpected needs or sudden downturn of income).

How much is needed?

In the event of the need to close down the charity, a reserve of six months' worth of spending allows FRP to continue to deliver projects related to restricted funds (i.e. grant-funded projects) and to wind down our other activities in an organised fashion – all whilst still

operating legally and safely. Six months running costs is often cited as a desirable level of reserves – but each charity is individual. Some aspects of the way FRP works mean that dealing with financial difficulties or a wind down would be easier/cheaper/quicker than some other charities, because: our workers are self-employed freelancers, not employed, we are not currently beholden to other entities by binding agreements, e.g. leases or contracts, that we would need to fulfil most of our beneficiaries would not be classed as ‘vulnerable’.

In the case of a wind down, we would still aim to complete projects funded by external grants, where practical (a few projects may be too long-running, so we would have to hand back some of the grant). Additionally, there would inevitably be costs incurred in a wind down, particularly in accounting and legal matters, so some of the reserve would be spent on this.

Charity Commission guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-reserves-cc19/charities-and-reserves#sA1>

Friends of Rowntree Park Charity Trustee Becci Blues is happy to answer any queries or provide further clarification: becci.blues@gmail.com