

Friends and anemones

Why are Harrogate's Valley Gardens pulling in a lot of new pals? Jo Haywood reports

Success attracts new friends like nectar attracts bees. At least that's what Harrogate Borough Council is hoping after relaunching its Friends of Valley Gardens group.

The Grade II listed gardens in Low Harrogate which, along with woodland known as The Pinewoods, cover 17 acres, were crowned by the Royal Horticultural Society as the country's Best Public Park in 2009 which is the highest discretionary accolade the Britain in Bloom judges have at their disposal.

The original friends' group of volunteer gardeners, fundraisers and campaigners was formed in 1987

under the presidency of renowned gardener Geoffrey Smith and the chairmanship of his wife Anne. They, along with fellow Valley Gardens supporters Alf Wight (or James Herriot as he became known to millions) and conservationist David Bellamy, initially set up the group to save the Sun Pavilion and Colonnades from being demolished.

Mrs Smith stood down from the chairmanship last year after 22 successful years at the helm, but this didn't mark the end of the friends as some feared. In fact, it prompted a new beginning as the council decided to restart a formal friends' group at the end of the year and is now in the process of establishing a committee. : : :