

MINUTES OF THE FRIENDS OF VALLEY GARDENS MEETING
7.00pm – 24th November 2009

Present: G McCormick, H Andrew, D Edwards, T Sissons, P Woffinden, M Bruce, S Collier, P Collier, P Knight, B Hawkes, B Bentley, C Kelley, R Cooper, K Moorhouse, D Moorhouse, P Thompson, J Huett, A Martin, S Wood, J Davey, R Johnston, R Marsh, P Marsh, T McLaughlin, P Kilburn, K Dawson

Apologies: Nigel Heptinstall, Cllr Andrew Jones, Jean Knight, B Mann, M Mann

Chair: Patrick Kilburn, Head of Parks and Open Spaces

Minutes: Kate Dawson, Parks Development Officer

1. Welcome and Introductions

Everyone introduced themselves and briefly explained their interest in the Gardens and the Group

2. Minutes from previous meeting

Minutes of the first meeting had been distributed and additional copies were available at the meeting

3. Constitution and Governance Arrangements

A draft constitution for the Friends Group was distributed to all present – see attached copy. Agreed by the group this should be reviewed prior to the next meeting when it will be discussed in more detail. If group members had any suggestions if these were sent to Kate Dawson in time for the next meeting they could be included in the agenda for discussion.

4. Officer Positions

Usually there are four main Committee roles as follows:

Chair – who would facilitate group meetings, organise and help the group achieve its aims and objectives, needs to know what is going on and be able to plan ahead, be a positive example and represent the group i.e. turn up to as many events/meetings as possible, be able to coordinate and be the main link with the Council.

Vice Chair – assists other positions on committee, provides cover for Chair and Secretary should they be unable to attend, shares responsibility with the Chair.

Secretary – takes care of the groups correspondence, creates the agenda for the meetings with the Chair, takes minutes during the meetings, types them up and distributes them to the members, keeps all group members informed and involved, books meeting rooms.

Treasurer – keeps up to date accounts of all the finances, manages the bank account (with two signatories), pays bills, has accurate book keeping skills, and manages the petty cash.

It was agreed the most appropriate method for nomination would be to self nominate including a short CV (description as to why you feel you would be appropriate for the position). Either send to Kate Dawson in advance of the next meeting or at the meeting. There would then be a vote for each position.

In the interim period Patrick Kilburn (Head of Parks & Open Spaces) agreed to Chair the next two to three meetings (as a maximum) in order for the members of the group to get to know each other in preparation for voting.

It was confirmed that the printing /photocopying could be undertaken by the Council to support the group but the preferred method of distribution would be via email. If necessary the minutes could be typed for the first couple of meetings only until the Secretary was appointed.

5. Insurance

If the group becomes active in Valley Gardens they must be insured. Harrogate Borough Council Parks Division will pay for the first year's insurance in order to support the development of the group. KD will work with the Treasurer (once in post) to sort out the most suitable Public Liability Insurance for the group.

For clarification Patrick explained that if the Parks team organise an event/activity in the park all attendees would be covered by the Council's insurance. If the Friends Group organise an event/activity, the attendees will be covered by the group's insurance, if other parties (such as the Army Foundation College or Scouts or Schools) wish to work in Valley Gardens they would need to have their own insurance.

Public Liability Insurance is imperative as it covers the group's activities, both group members and claims from members of the public.

6. Finances

It is advisable to set up a Bank Account for the group so that any grants or donations etc can be paid directly into it. It is necessary to have an independent bank account for most grants It will also be required for expenses claims and petty cash.

Most High Street Banks offer 'charity' accounts – these usually operate the same as a business account where at least two signatories are required.

The accounts are usually produced annually for the Annual General Meeting and independently audited.

It was discussed whether it would be suitable to have an Accountant look after the finances rather than have a Treasurer. The group were advised that this would incur a cost (possibly a considerable amount) and is not normally required for Friends Groups so the advice would be for the group to nominate a Treasurer and open an account, once set up it is likely it will run very smoothly.

7. New Zealand Garden update

Patrick provided an overview of the work in the New Zealand Garden. As most people will have noticed this area has been cleared by the dedicated team working in Valley Gardens and the clearance works will continue to the borders around the toilets.

The area was initially planted in 1953/4 following plant donations from Wellington (Harrogate's sister-city in New Zealand) and Christ Church Botanical Gardens in New Zealand. As some of the plants have not acclimatised to our harsher climate this area needs work. The re-planting works will be funded from a bequest of £10,000 received from the Estate of the late Mr. Broadwith, to redevelop this area and replant species specific to New Zealand.

The clearance works have included the removal of much of the overgrown areas (except New Zealand species) and some large Leylandii and a diseased Ash tree, which may seem drastic but will allow plenty of space to plant appropriate New Zealand species.

A small project team has been set up - Patrick, Trish, the Area Manager, Head Gardener, Tony Sissons and an expert from Harlow Carr who will work with a Landscape Architect to develop ideas and plans for the garden. Plans should be available in mid December and will be copied to all the group and put on display in Crescent Gardens for members of the public to view and pass comments back to the Parks Team.

The Mayor of Harrogate Cllr Mrs Pat Jones has written to the Mayor of Wellington describing the project and asking for a donation of plants or possibly a sculpture for the site. As we have a Civic connection with Wellington, it was proposed that we keep them fully informed as to what is happening (i.e. send them the plans and photos). This was agreed.

Sir Thomas Ingilby is arranging a 'Golden Oldies' Cricket tournament for next summer and it has been proposed that the official opening of the revamped New Zealand Garden takes place in August when the visitors from New Zealand are in the locality.

It is intended that the planting will commence in February 2010 to be completed by the end of March. The majority of the group confirmed they would be interested in joining the usual team in Valley Gardens on a drop in basis to help with this planting. Further details to follow in the New Year. Anyone attending will be covered by the Council's insurance, will not need any specific protective clothing but are asked to wear stout shoes or boots preferable with steel toe protectors and gloves.

It was commented that in New Zealand they have a blue blossom tree and could it be considered for Valley Gardens.

8. The way forward

Patrick Kilburn agreed to Chair the next couple of meetings until the new Chair had been appointed but stressed that it is only for a limited time as Council staff have many groups to support and meetings to attend. Kate Dawson will continue to take the minutes under the same terms, as Patrick is Chair.

It was asked that everyone consider the committee positions and the constitution prior to the next meeting, as this will be an agenda item.

It was requested that everyone consider what they hope to achieve in the gardens, any ideas and plans etc also problems so these could be discussed at future meetings, however it would be preferred that these are brought to the attention of Kate Dawson prior to the meeting so they are added as Agenda items.

It was proposed the group would like to create a leaflet/pamphlet detailing the interesting plants in Valley Gardens with a map to have available for distribution from Tourist Information and other locations. This is an ideal example of partnership working between the Friends Group and Harrogate Borough Council; it is also an ideal opportunity to apply for grants to fund it.

It was explained that it is not imperative to become a registered charity – to do so the group must have a turn over of at least £5,000 annually. It is a long and complicated process, which can be discussed once the group is fully established.

9. Any Other Business

The following items were proposed for adding to the next agenda:

- Skate Park
- Youths on Bikes
- Youths playing football in the colonnades/bandstand
- Play Area – attracting gangs of youths who congregate at night
- Objectives for the group – they need to be developmental not just maintenance based

As some issues relate to the policing of the park (youths congregating etc) it was agreed that the Police Constable covering the Gardens should be invited to the next meeting to respond to some of the issues. It was also explained that over the winter the PCSO for the area was using the Games in Parks hut in Valley Gardens as a base so there would be a more obvious presence of Police in the Gardens.

It was reported that the play area seems to be attracting gangs of youths who, on occasion, congregate at night and into the early hours of the morning. They can be noisy and in possession of alcohol, and damage the play area, cars and local properties. This situation is being reviewed and methods are in place to try to resolve this such as considering removing the roof of the castle, having more police patrols and locking the zip wire on an evening. It was also agreed the gates to the play area would be locked at night to see whether this prevents the youths congregating.

Skate Park – It was agreed that the young people of Harrogate and the wider area needed a skate park. There followed a detailed discussion relating to the most suitable location for this – previous consultation identified numerous sites but they were all rejected by the local residents. Valley Gardens is central and easily accessible. A group of ‘skaters’ who Parks have previously worked with, whose ages ranged from 8-25, are still in contact with Patrick and will be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the possibility of locating a skate park in Valley Gardens. If a permanent skate park was built it would probably be constructed in concrete which would be less noisy than the temporary mobile skate parks which have been installed in the tennis courts during school holidays.

Go Ape in the Lake District was an excellent opportunity for all ages to join in physical activity – could this be considered in Valley Gardens/Pinewoods? We need to utilise what facilities we have.

12. Next Meeting

Thursday 21st January 2010, 7.00pm. In the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Crescent Gardens. Bring a friend and/or mention it to all interested parties.

All agenda items to be forwarded to Kate Dawson, email kate.dawson@harrogate.gov.uk or by telephone 0845 300 60 91