

**MINUTES OF THE VALLEY GARDENS FRIENDS GROUP MEETING INITIAL MEETING
7.00pm – 14th October 2009**

Present: Geoff Scurrah, Frances Scurrah, Harry Stephenson, Kate Stephenson, Angela Prescott, Alan Connell, Mary Mann, Peter Blayney, Jane Blayney, Caroline Bayliss, Pat Marsh, Reg Marsh, Maureen Littlefair, Fiona Scott, Simon Collier, Paula Collier, Mary Smeaton, Des Smeaton, Sasha Jackson, Doreen Edwards, Andrew McMillan, Victor Lusler, Ceri Haymer, Joe Davey, Christopher Wilson, Don MacKenzie, Andrew Jones, Margaret Bruce, Brenda Taylor, Sue Wood, Ann Golden, Thelma Harrison, George McCormick, Nigel Heptinstall, Anne Smith, Tom Holleman, Marge Holleman, Richard Cooper, Audrey Walker, Graham Walker, Jean Knight, Phillip Knight, Mark Bexley

Chair: Patrick Kilburn, Head of Parks and Open Spaces

Minutes: Patricia McLaughlin, Parks Development Manager, Kate Dawson, Parks Development Officer

1. Apologies

Betty Bentley, Tony Sissons, Jon Collins, Peter Sutcliffe, Margaret Sutcliffe

2. Introductions

Patrick Kilburn (Head of Parks & Open Spaces), Patricia McLaughlin (Parks Development Manager), Kate Dawson (Parks Development Officer), all of Harrogate Borough Council Parks Department

3. Welcome

Patrick thanked all for attending and announced to anyone who had not already heard that Valley Gardens has been Awarded the RHS Best Public Park Award 2009 from the Britain in Bloom judges.

4. Comments from the Play Area Consultation

- Add more seating

This was taken on board during the design stage and additional seating including picnic tables have been included within the Play Area

- Create a dog area, keep dogs on leads

This was suggested during the very early stages of the consultation, as there had been a suggestion to not fence the play area. However following on from this and other similar comments the play area was fenced to prevent dogs easily accessing the area

- A bit more landscaping actually in the play area

This was achieved by including grassy mounds, additional grassed areas in and around the play equipment, the site is no longer a flat piece of tarmac it has structure and undulations

- I think some more money should be spent on tree/bush control/thinning of the borders of the gardens

It is felt this is something the Council and the Friends Group can work together on. Partnership working will increase the number of suitable areas identified and ensure the projects are a complete success.

- Add a kiosk close to the play area to monitor activity and sell drinks and ice creams

This is something the Parks Team are working towards and with the help of the Friends group, fundraising will be easier and the style/location of such a building should be able to be agreed.

5. 2009 Successes

- New Play Area
- Vegetable Bed
- Revamped Scree Garden
- Variety of successful events such as National Play Day

6. 2010 Plans

- New Zealand Garden

It is planned that this rather overgrown area will be cut back, opened up and replanted as necessary with species originating from New Zealand. It is likely the Council will contact the Mayor of Wellington to discuss appropriate planting and possible donations. The area extending towards the toilets will be opened up and improved also.

- Allotment Garden to help Harrogate & District Allotment Federation (HDAF) celebrate the 50th Annual Allotment Show in Harrogate.

This Allotment will be planted in one of the Herbaceous Border Beds in partnership with HDAF. It will be for one year only, which will then allow the Herbaceous Border Bed to be reinstated into improved soil.

- RHS Harlow Carr – 60th Anniversary Perennial Bed.

RHS Harlow Carr will plant this into one end of the Scroll Bed in partnership with Harrogate Borough Council. After the year this area will be ready to be replanted as usual by Harrogate Borough Council parks team

7. Questions

Q • What does becoming a Friend entail?

A PK explained this would be covered in more detail later by KD but essentially it means you care about the Gardens, have an interest in it and want to ensure it remains as beautiful as today. A friend does not have to physically work in the gardens or have a detailed knowledge of Horticulture, each person will bring different skills, knowledge and experience to the group, which will enable the group to work better and more efficiently.

Q • Congratulations on the recent award to all involved. What the problems are include the Lottery Bid from a couples ago, the eyesore that is the Gardeners Storage Yard and the mobile skate park. What are the explanations for this and how can it be improved?

A The Lottery Bid was going to be to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Harrogate Borough Council had approximately £250,000 specifically allocated to Valley Gardens, this money could (at the time) be used as 10% third party funding therefore allowing over £two million being available, however when the Parks team spoke to HLF they explained changes to grants had resulted in a requirement to fund 25% third party therefore resulting in only £One becoming available. An application would cost approximately £70,000 to submit (due to landscape drawings and qualified architects being required). Further discussion resulted in the Council being told that due to the Olympics all applicants must be able to supply 50% funding, as funds were limited therefore the scheme would only be for £500,000. As no guarantees are in place when applying it was decided by Harrogate Borough Council not to risk applying for funding and potentially spending £70,000 in the process but to allocate all £250,000 on the park itself.

The eyesore by the Gardeners Yard is a potential project for the Friends Group to design screening etc and work with the council to ensure this is maintained.

There were some issues with the mobile skate park mainly that users were very keen to use it at all times. The Cabinet Member for Cultural Services is extremely keen to provide a permanent facility within Valley Gardens.

Q • The mobile skate park was kept open too late and much longer than originally agreed, it will need money spending on it to make sure it is kept safe etc. Also the issues with the play area and noise haven't gone away. What is the council doing about this?

A As was previously explained the Cabinet Member for Cultural Services is very keen for a permanent skate park to be installed, this will have secure fencing that youths can't break into. It will be much stronger and dense therefore not as noisy when in use. We are aware there are some issues with the play area and are ensuring it is checked on a regular basis, certain pieces of equipment are fastened up at night to prevent their use etc.

Q • Does the Council have a plants list?

A Not at present, however lists could be drawn up in some areas in partnership with the Friends Group and if applicable identification labels be introduced.

Q • There is a lack of facilities/public conveniences especially between Valley Gardens and Harlow Carr.

A It is proposed that a new building be created close to the children's play area which will have male/female toilets with baby changing facilities. There are no plans to any other toilets.

Q • The current toilets are in an area that is very overgrown and are surrounded by broken lights. What can be done about this?

A The area of planting will be included for improvement (cutting back/thinning etc) with the work to be carried out this winter in the New Zealand Garden. This should improve it, with regards to broken lights, we will notify the Street Lighting and ask them to arrange the repairs as necessary.

Q • Nigel Heptinstall – Harrogate Biodiversity Action Group raised a concern that there should be a variety of planting styles to encourage invertebrates, examples would be keeping some of the grass longer

A This is something we can look at and work in partnership with the Friends of Valley Gardens to develop if it desired by all.

Q • The evergreens along Valley Drive are now very large and overgrown, they block the light to the buildings opposite is there any chance they can either be cut down or replaced?

A These can be reviewed by our Arboricultural Team who will feedback at a future meeting.

Q • The Japanese Garden is very exposed whereas it should be a quiet area, children often run through it.

A This is another area where the planting can be reviewed, and working closely together (The Friends Group and the Council) the garden can be developed.

8. What is a Friends Group

Kate Dawson then presented to all a short power point about Friends Groups.

What is a Friends Group?

- A group of interested local people who come together with the aim for improving the appearance, facilities, activities, conservation value and safety of their local park.
- Works with other local residents to help the council ensure it is a park that people want to use

- Can contribute to making decisions on how the park will be managed in the future and help secure funding for the future of the park.

9. Committee

- A Friends Group usually has a committee and constitution though it can be more informal.
- The committee is made up of The Chairperson, Vice Chair, Secretary & Treasurer

Nomination forms for these positions will be sent out with the minutes ready for the next meeting. People who are not on the committee are still welcome at the meetings

10. Initial Plans

Initial Plans could include

- A Constitution – a sample will be sent out with the minutes
- Public Liability Insurance & Bank Accounts
- Meetings – decisions on the frequency
- Minutes
- Working parties

11. Questions

- Q • Should the Friends Group be a registered charity?
- A Not necessarily – if the group wishes to become a registered charity we would not stop you – however, the forms are long and there are still plenty of opportunities to secure funding without this.
- Q There was going to be a wild flower garden as a small trial, was this carried out & did it work?
- A It was carried out but did not work very well at all so the idea was not taken any further.
- Q If there were a Friends Group would you stop consulting the wider public?
- A That would depend on the amount of money being spent on a specific project and the size of the area impacted. If it were to be a large scale project with a substantial amount of finances then we would still consult with the wider public as well as the Friends Group, however if it were to be a small scale project such as redesigning one small area with very little finance we would not consult the wider public but would discuss it with the Friends Group.
- Q Do Friends Groups charge a subscription?
- A Some do but usually once they are more established. Others (such as Friends of Bachelor Fields or Friends of Jacob Smith Park) have decided not to charge, as they would rather have members who come along to meetings with ideas and commitment rather than just to make money from a non vocal member. This is something that can be decided at any time by the Friends Group.
- Q Once the Friends Group is established are they able to hold money making events in the park – National Play Day was a huge success etc?
- A Yes it can be. National Play Day was not held as a moneymaking event this year as the aim of the day was purely to get children and families playing together and having fun.

12. Next Meeting

On asking how many attending would be interested in joining a Friends Group for Valley Gardens approximately two thirds responded positively.

The next meeting will be held on **Tuesday 24th November, 7.00pm at Crescent Gardens, Committee Room (directions will be available upon arrival).**