

MINUTES OF THE FRIENDS OF VALLEY GARDENS MEETING
7.00pm – 21st January 2010

Present: Rosemary Johnston, Paula Collier, Simon Collier, Tony Sissons, Tom Holleman, Pat Marsh, Reg Marsh, Margaret Bruce, Betty Bentley, Brenda Hawkes, Brenda Taylor, Andrew Jones, Steve Thompson, Josh Hallett, Rachel & Owen Gregory, Tim Humberstone, Ross Harrison, Tom Glegg, Pete Valentine, Stevie Cussons, Rosemary Thompsom, Pamela Millen, Geoff Scurrah, Ben Coebell, Alex Maughn, Max Dowey, Ghilyon Welby-Jenkins, Adam Love, Jane Agars, Will Geldart, James Harrison, Matt Patterson, Davy Clemmit, Marcus Kay, Billy Nelson, Robbie Nelson, Sam Hallett, Alan Rawson, Claire Kelley, Gordon Charlton, Nina Swift, Peter Hess, Sue Wood, Alex Sparks, Harry Henderson, Oliver Wheatley, Tom Zealand, Dan Jones, Thomas Van dan Hoeven, Harry Rodgers, Oliver Murray, George McCormick, John Jakes, Harriet Andrew, Helen & Sopia McCann, J Maughn, D Edwards, Stuart Aitken, Liam Hobson, Dennis Moorhouse, Janet Small, Matthew Price

Apologies: Nigel Heptinstall, Peter Blayney, Mary Mann. Alan Cornell, Mrs A Ainsworth, Karen Moorhouse, Angela Prescott, Jo Huett, Andrew McMillan, Jane & Ian Gardner, Sarah Parkinson

Chair: Patrick Kilburn, Head of Parks and Open Spaces

Minutes: Kate Dawson, Parks Development Officer

1. Welcome and Introductions

Patrick Kilburn (PK) - Head of Parks and Open Spaces, Cllr Richard Cooper (RC) – Cabinet member for Cultural Services, Kate Dawson (KD)– Parks Development Officer, Trish McLaughlin (TMc)– Parks Development Manager

2. Minutes from previous meeting

Amendment to previous minutes – the roof is not being removed from the castle, some of the walls are being changed this is explained in point 8.
No matters arising that are not already on the minutes.

3. Constitution and Governance Arrangements

Draft Constitution available, has been sent to all previous attendees. No comments or amendments have been sent to KD, please review, as this is the document that will govern working practices of the group. Amends/comments should be sent to KD before the next meeting.

4. Officer Positions

PK agreed to Chair for another couple of meetings so people could get to know each other. KD will continue for the same time as Secretary.

Two nominations so far

Chair – Tom Holleman (CV attached)

Secretary – Helen McCann (CV attached)

Anyone wishing to stand for a position (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary or Treasurer) should contact KD with a short CV for circulation with the agenda for the next meeting

Election/agreement at next meeting.

5. **New Zealand Garden Update**

The garden area has now been fully cleared and ground preparation is currently taking place.

Chestnut rail fencing is shortly to be installed down Cornwall Road and a new Hawthorn hedge will be planted.

Planting plans for the garden have been received which show 5 distinct typical NZ habitat areas:

- Beech woodland margin
- Sub alpine tussock lands
- Swamp and creek fringe
- Alpine herb fields
- Forest bush margin

To allow visitors to explore these areas it is proposed to create new informal paths. These will most likely be topped with woodchip but if budgets allow it is proposed to construct the central path using wooden decking which is commonly used in NZ.

The plans for the area on the opposite side of the path haven't been finalised yet. 3 large conifers were removed but the trunks retained because which it is hoped can be used to create wood sculptures. Initial contact with the Local Authority in Wellington has been made and it is anticipated that they will be involved in the development of the gardens including new ideas on appropriate sculptures.

Next steps are to finalise the planting list, order the plants and start planting mid to late February.

Volunteers

The assistance of volunteers are welcome when plantings and those who are interested to contact Kate who will take details and advice on arrangements. Volunteers will be covered by HBC Insurance providing they have arranged to volunteer in advance with KD.

Copies of the plan are available – should one be required please contact KD who will arrange to send out.

It is possible to get a local school involved – Brackenfield Gardening Club was suggested and it was requested contact details be handed over to KD who will arrange a visit as appropriate.

Additional fundraising could be undertaken by the group to enable the installation of a decked pathway for example as this could be added at a later stage.

6. **Allotment Bed**

The bed will be part of the 50 years celebration of the allotment show at the Valley Gardens on 22nd August 2010. The area is 15 metres by 9 metres and will be split into 2 areas one displaying produce from the 1960's and the other side the changes that have taken place in allotment growing and using vegetables grown in 2010.

The bed in the Valley Gardens has been marked out and rotivated. The bed is due to be dug over and some manure added over the next few weeks. The plans for the vegetables to be grown have been discussed with the Allotment Federation.

Planting will take place in April and on going into May and June. Two schools will get involved in the project Western County Primary School Pre- school group and St Peter's School.

St Peter's School has already booked some dates to visit the allotment with Clive Pickles Secretary of the Allotment Federation

30th March – before planting to assess the site

22nd April – planting veg

24th June – Harvesting and maintenance

Maintenance will be by the members of the various allotment sites in Harrogate with support by the Valley Gardens staff.

Once the site is planted etc there are opportunities for interpretation around the site for example

- information on the various crops,
- composting
- recycling
- Biodiversity/encouraging Wildlife
- Companion Planting
- Healthy Living – the plot can be linked to the Change4life campaign www.nhs.uk/Change4life which promotes healthy living and exercise

Also there will be a display stand at the allotment show to display some of the produce and show photos of the site developing

Proposed planting plans are available and can be sent to anyone expressing an interest with KD. These clearly explain the differences between the types of planting over the 50 years.

It will resemble a real allotment with a fence etc, CCTV can cover the area though it is felt this should not be necessary.

7. Skate Park

PK showed a selection of slides depicting a concept idea of a skate park in Valley Gardens close to the tennis courts and pitch and putt area. The design has already been built elsewhere and it was stressed this was purely a concept idea. If Cabinet approve a Skate Park be developed in Valley Gardens (Cabinet Decision Meeting on 03.02.10, 5.30pm), consultation will be undertaken to design a skate park specifically for Valley Gardens. It will be developed to fit in with the surroundings and landscape and to ensure it blends in appropriately to ground level it will attract a variety of users though it is difficult to predict exact numbers.

RC handed out his contact details and asked everyone to contact him with their feelings, whether in support of the Skate Park or not. Alternatively comments can be sent to KD or PK. All opinions will be taken into consideration providing they are received prior to the meeting on 3rd February but there will be further opportunities to air views etc as the project progresses if it is approved on the 3rd. Generally the mood of the groups was positive towards such a development.

Regarding location – a final decision has not been made – this will be determined at the Cabinet Meeting on 3rd February. The official deadline for comments is 22nd January however; RC stated he would be willing to take into consideration all comments up until the meeting.

If approval is granted it is hoped the skate park would be installed before Christmas 2010, this would allow for European advertisements for Contractors (if required), proposals, consultations, design evaluations, planning application and consideration award of contract and build.

If approval is granted anyone interested in the design of the skate park will be welcome to contribute – the concept idea is the largest available skate park for the available funds £140,000. It should be realised that not everyone will get what they want but all will get something that will be usable and will have a say. It will also be designed to include for skaters, scooters, BMX etc.

Security – there are no plans for a fence to be installed, it will be open access but if necessary a fence can be added at a later date. CCTV will be installed to cover the area (it will be infra red as the others within the gardens are). At present there are no plans to install lights, as with all facilities in Valley Gardens it will be considered to be a daylight

activity.

It was pointed out that the proposed area can be rather muddy and boggy (as with the Ripon Skate Park and the play area in Valley Gardens). The proposal is to rectify this through design with the introduction of catch drains and integrated drainage to remove the water from the site.

During the meeting there was support for the development of a skate park in Valley Gardens, comments included it would save families money on travel to other towns/cities. It is very central and accessible, it is equal distance from houses, it requires no additional Council Tax to fund. It was felt the introduction of a skate park is unlikely to increase the amount of incidents of anti social behaviour in Valley Gardens.

There is no byelaw for the Valley Gardens to prevent cycling. The signs are to act as a preventative measure only.

At present there are no plans for a temporary skate park over the summer.

It was stressed that it is only a perception that the Skate Park will bring problems, there were other issues surrounding the skate park at the Hydro. Valley Gardens is the preferred location of the Police due to the surveillance options and CCTV (neither were in place at the Hydro site).

It is evident from their behaviour at the meeting this evening that people are underestimating the behaviour of the young people involved. They will self-police the skate park and take ownership of the area.

Whilst generally the mood of the meeting was supportive to the proposals there was some concern about the possibilities of some antisocial behaviour once it was built. PK advised that if this were the case then steps would be taken to resolve working with other agencies such as the police and the youth services.

8. Play Area

Due to some reports of Anti-Social Behaviour in the play area, particularly relating to the Castle, a review has been undertaken to determine ways to modify the top of the castle without compromising the warranty. A solution has been found which will replace two sides with railings so it is fully visible to CCTV and less comfortable. These modifications will require the sides to be removed and the castle will be fenced off (to prevent access) for a couple of weeks in early February whilst the works are undertaken.

Regarding the grass/muddy surface, additional grass matting has recently been installed, which has improved the area already, seed will be applied in the growing season.

The play area has been locked on an evening and though the play area is still being accessed only two reports have been received of anti social behaviour.

There were some complaints about sledging in the Gardens, however, this is a seasonal activity and as such the complaints were dealt with at the time.

9. Youths on bikes/football

It was reiterated that there is not a byelaw in place relating to the prevention of riding bikes within the Gardens. It is a very complex matter to get a byelaw in place and the issue would also be how such a byelaw is policed.

If people are seen causing a nuisance whilst riding bikes in the Gardens these should be reported to PCSO John Jakes who will ask them not to ride within the park. It is the cyclist's responsibility to ride safely but there is no legal enforcement. PK will look into getting the signs repainted to try to prevent unnecessary cycling within the Park.

If footballs are kicked deliberately at buildings it can be perceived as criminal damage and PCSO John Jakes has removed footballs in the past.

10. Overgrown bushes along Harlow Moor Drive

A letter has been submitted to PK relating to this, he will review it and respond. At present

there are no plans to redesign this area.

11. Any Other Business

What is the definition of a Friend? – It is a user who works closely with the Council and others to develop/maintain the gardens and ensures access for all. They may help secure funding and promotion of the park etc.

There were some very positive comments relating to the CCTV operations. A visit was suggested however, PK is unsure if this is possible allude to legal restrictions relating to data protection etc. PK to check out and get back to the group. The set up was praised for the work undertaken.

Go Ape – this has not been looked into as yet. There is usually a charge for using such facilities and it is felt the group has enough on at the minute with the Skate Park, New Zealand Garden and Allotment Bed without following up on this just yet.

Harrogate still has a Park Ranger; he has been working for the Council for over 30 years, 365 days per year 24/7 as required. The role is currently being reviewed to ensure the Council and the public are getting the most out of him and what areas of responsibility he has. He covers the full district but does focus a large amount of time on the Pinewoods and Valley Gardens area.

PCSO John Jakes advised that a serious incident had been reported that happened within Valley Gardens. On 13/01/10 a schoolgirl was walking home along Cold Bath Road at 3.15pm. A man stopped and engaged her in conversation then followed her into the Gardens and sexually abused her. He was described as white, aged 35-40, about 6' tall, slim to medium build with mousey, greasy hair just above shoulder length and a gaunt thin face. He had a pale complexion and clean-shaven. He was wearing a navy blue waist length raincoat, dark coloured straight-legged jeans and Timberland style boots. If anyone recognises the description please contact PCSO John Jakes or the Police Station. If anyone wishes to join the Link Master System where the Police can contact you with crime reports in your area and keep you informed please also contact PCSO John Jakes.

12. Next Meeting

Thursday 25th February 2010, 7.30pm. 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 no later than 12th February.

If you wish to be considered for a committee position please send a short CV and your details to KD using the above contacts.