



Minutes of the public meeting held on Monday, 11th March 2019 at 7pm at the Mitre Pub, Knaresborough

Present: Mike Pyle (Chairman), Richard Williams (Treasurer), Jo Smalley (Secretary), Elsa Wiehe (Under-Secretary), Harrogate Borough Council (HBC) Countryside Ranger Sam Walker, Keith Blackwood, Paul Birtwhistle, Keith West, Stella Barclay, Mike Cope, Sharon Pinder, Andrew Pinder, Hilary Hopkinson, Trevor Hopkinson.

1) Chairperson's welcome/apologies

Mike Pyle welcomed members of the public to the meeting and apologised for moving venue. The Commercial Inn is closed at the moment, so the Mitre kindly allowed the use of its facilities.

Apologies

Richard Owen-Hughes, Councillor Samantha Mearns, Phil Oldfield.

2) Approval of the minutes of the last public meeting held on Monday, 19 November 2018

Keith Blackwood proposed the minutes and Mike Cope seconded.

4) Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5) Treasurer's report:

Richard Williams gave an account of the finances of the Friends' Group, and the various generous donations received. Please find attached a copy of the Treasurer's audited report for 2018/2019.

6) Maintenance:

Mike Pyle said how very grateful the Friends are that Sam Walker (HBC) is able to attend regular meetings. Sam was thanked for all the invaluable help and support he gives to the Friends' Group, and for the hard work he carries out to keep the park well cared for.

Sycamore trees

Sam Walker (HBC) explained that a 10 year survey of the park's wall, for health and safety purposes, was undertaken by HBC contractors in May 2016. Risks had been identified as urgent, medium and long term. There is a small part of the wall on Scotch George Lane which is leaning, and this could

affect the wall's structural integrity. At the moment there is an ongoing debate between the consultant who carried out the survey and the Council's arbor team, regarding the possible felling of several sycamore trees growing near this section. Until this is resolved, work is stalled.

The Arboricultural Manager will make his final decision within the next two weeks as to whether these sycamore trees should be felled, and the wall then rebuilt plumb. The Council has a policy of two for one when replacing felled trees.

Large access gate

The gate by the pedestrian entrance has been badly bent. The cause of this dent is not fully known, but it looks like a vehicle, possibly a van, has reversed into it. As soon as the problem was identified, the Council was very quick to act and fix it.

Entrance bark chippings

A new delivery of bark chippings was delivered by HBC a few weeks' ago to spread at the entrance where the ground gets muddy.

The Friends of Jacob Smith Park would like to thank the HBC Parks Team for all its help.

Grass cutting

Sam Walker (HBC) also explained that the grass in the park would ideally get cut 14 times during the growing season. Hopefully it should get its first cut on time this year. This is the time to decide and define where the walkways should be.

Hay cutting

The farmer who carried out the cut last year got a bumper crop, and fortunately wants to cut for hay again this year. He intends to cut all HBC's sites. There have been problems in the past finding a farmer willing to take the meadow hay. Everyone agreed that this is wonderful news. It is so important that the hay is cut and removed from site to provide the ideal conditions for spread of native wildflowers and grasses. Perhaps last summer's dry weather and consequent hay shortage was the reason that this farmer was so keen in the first place.

Himalayan Balsam

The annual balsam bashes are a regular feature of park life. Himalayan Balsam is an invasive non-native species which takes over green spaces and prevents native wildflower species from becoming established.

Last year's dry summer reduced the amount of balsam, but sprouting seedlings can already be seen. Sam Walker (HBC) said the farmer could possibly cut the balsam down before it sets seed. The most important place to focus on by the Friends Group is the area around the wildlife pond. This will need manual control by hand-pulling.

Jo Smalley added that both the balsam bash events held last year on Sundays 24th and 30th June were well attended, and people enjoyed the opportunity to get together to support the park. Jo will put up posters and advertise the bashes through the usual channels nearer the time. Andrew Pinder suggested that an evening balsam bash (say 6pm-8pm) could be added to the calendar this year, for those people not able to make Sundays. Jo agreed this is a very good idea and will make sure it happens.

Mike Pyle said that many people using the park rip out the balsam as they go past. However, when the balsam plants rot on the path, they go slimy. Jo Smalley suggested that posters, social media, the Friends' Group email list, the media and the park's website could be used as mediums to highlight to people why help is desperately needed to hand pull the balsam, whilst politely asking those members of the park community to put their piles of balsam off the paths.

Tree aftercare

The two donated oak saplings died and were replaced by HBC before Christmas. As soon as they green up, Jo Smalley will water them once a week for the next three months, as well as watering the three newest oaks last year that survived. They will also need clearing around their bases.

Regarding the native blackthorn planted at the very top of the park, roughly 50% appears to have taken. The Friends' Group will make sure that they are kept clear of encroaching vegetation. Other trees planted in recent years are thriving.

There are no plans at the moment to plant other trees in the park now. This is due to following an agreed planting plan, drawn up in conjunction with the park's trustees. However, further trees may be planted to replace ones that require felling, due to wall maintenance, or those that fall because of natural causes like old age or disease.

Manhole cover

There are large holes in the earth around a manhole cover in the park. Keith Blackwood kindly volunteered to fill the gaps in with soil from the mole hills.

7) Enhancements:

Community wildlife pond

The most significant enhancement has been the creation of the park's community wildlife pond. A great dipping platform is now in place and Jo Smalley reports that we are looking at lengthening it with some extra board walk for easier access. This additional work has been budgeted for £400.

On Thursday, 21st March six volunteers: including Jo Smalley, Elsa Wiehe and Sam Walker (HBC) are to have some pond ecology training in the park delivered by Andrew Westgarth from Quantum Environmental. This will also help volunteers to obtain their Great Crested Newt handling licences, so that educational sessions can eventually be offered to local children, as well as allowing the Friends' Group to carry out its own important pond monitoring to learn about and record pond biodiversity.

Pond dipping equipment and other educational resources have been donated by a large company, wishing to remain anonymous. Jo will take delivery of all equipment at her address, and she will be in charge of cleaning it and storing it after each pond investigation.

Sam Walker said that the vegetation on the margins would improve. Last year several unidentified newts and a nesting moorhen were seen.

An identification board cannot be installed at the pond due to decisions made by the park's trustees. The Friends' Group agrees that it would be nice aesthetically to keep signage to a minimum in such a beautiful, natural parkland. Andrew Pinder suggested that as a compromise, a small plaque with a QR code could be positioned on the fence, and this would link to a special pond identification page

on the Friends' Group website (www.jacobsmithpark.co.uk). Andrew also felt this would be a good way of engaging youngsters.

Jo Smalley mentioned a local company, she believes called Quest, which carried out a treasure hunt in Knaresborough, using QR codes. Everyone agreed that Andrew's idea was a very good one – and Jo will investigate further.

Wildlife pile and hibernaculum

Jo Smalley and her children met Sam Walker (HBC) in the park recently to make a wildlife pile with wood from a storm damaged tree. Thank you to Sam for coming along with his chain saw! The Friends' Group hopes to make a hibernaculum for newts eventually, by following a design suggested by ecologist Andrew Westgarth. Any plans will be shared.

Interpretation board

The size and design of this depends on funds. Jo Smalley is continuing with its development. The park has a many layered history that goes back further than just the Jacob Smiths. Including the Iron Age and Medieval periods. There is £2,400 so far in the pot – monies pledged by the Knaresborough Lions and VAT covered by HBC. The Friends' Group is also expecting a donation from Knaresborough Town Council. Jo expressed thanks to all the generous funders so far.

£1,800 still needs to be raised if an interpretation board like the one at Viaduct Terrace on Waterside is to be achieved. The Heritage Lottery starts at a minimum of £3,000, so Jo is looking for smaller grants, sponsorship opportunities and is also considering crowd funding. Any more ideas would be welcome.

Log seats

The Friends are waiting for a tree to fall in the district to make some more log seats. Sam Walker and Richard (Treasurer) went to Sawley Saw Mill and found some suitable logs for the latest natural seats. Sam Walker kindly paid for the benches from his parks' budget. There have been lots of positive comments. The new seats are being used for family picnics as well as being a welcome resting and viewing point. A gentleman who enjoys the park regularly and had back surgery recently mentioned that, having a seat so close to the entrance, was a real help in him getting out for fresh air. This has given his mental health a boost. This all encourages a wider variety of people to use and enjoy the park. The park is for everyone to enjoy.

It was gratifying that so many volunteers turned up the day the logs needed to be put into their permanent places. In fact, more people volunteered than were eventually needed. So huge thanks to these members of the park community.

Hedging

There is scope to plant some extra hedging to fill in gaps to an original hedge. This follows a line and starts to the right of the new log seat nearest to the park pedestrian entrance. The Friends Group is to explore this further with Sam Walker (HBC) to see what the best course of action is. The trustees of Winifred Jacob Smith MBE will also need to be consulted.

Mike Pyle (Chairperson) stated that he felt the maintenance of the park was very good, as was its ongoing development. He asked those present if they had any other concerns. There were none.

8) Any Other Business:

Inconsiderate parking

This is an ongoing issue. Pedestrians are having problems accessing paths when cars are blocking them. It is also making it unsafe at times to cross Scriven Road safely to get into the park. Drivers pulling out of or into Park Grove Road, or making their way along Scriven Road, are also experiencing difficulties due to inconsiderate drivers.

Recently, Councillor Samantha Mearns became actively involved in tackling this behaviour. Initially, Councillor Mearns is to put a poster on the pedestrian gate appealing to drivers to park considerately. There will not be a permanent poster on the park gate but on lampposts eventually in the area. The Friends' Group fully support Councillor Mearns' efforts.

Double yellow lines

The Friends' Group helps to look after the park and its interests. The issue of double yellow lines to combat inconsiderate parking, will need to be addressed by the local council and residents. Hence, the Friends of JSP will not be campaigning for this, but will fully support the actions of those that do.

OSCAR dog food company vendor

There have been several reports that a vendor from OSCAR dog food is handing out leaflets to dog walkers, before being forceful with his sales techniques to the point of members of the public feeling harassed. HBC's legal team said that to take any action hard evidence is needed, not just hearsay, from the people who have experienced the behaviour first-hand.

Jo Smalley said she would put this advice onto the park's Facebook page. According to one member of the park community, the vendor stated that he would carry on trying to sell the dog food until he was told otherwise by the Council.

A member of the meeting mentioned that there was a man on the golf course, at the edge of Hookstone woods, who was hawking his dog food. He suggested we should link up with other HBC park users and dog walkers to see who else had been bothered.

Role of the Friends' Group and partnership agencies

Keith West asked about the role of the trustees, HBC and the Friends' Group.

When Winifred Jacob Smith MBE bequeathed the Park in 2008, this bequest came with a list of covenants. As a result, the trustees' solicitors need to give permission for any alterations. So, for example, when it came to fencing off the wildlife pond, permission had to be sought from the trustees before embarking on the work. HBC are the landowners. They are responsible for the safety of the park, to keep it useable, to maintain such elements as the walls and to keep the footpaths cut. HBC works in partnership with the Friends of the Park to: develop the site, promote enjoyment of the park for everyone, and ensure that it is kept as a natural parkland and that it is well cared for. On

the website www.jacobsmithpark.co.uk, the management plan is explained and the role of the HBC and the Friends explored in more detail.

New Friends of Jacob Smith Park Photo Group

Keith thanked Jo Smalley for formatting the photos of the park to the pages on Facebook.

Jo Smalley said that the public wanted to share photos they had taken in the park, but the settings on the Facebook page made it hard to do so, so the Friends of Jacob Smith Park Photo Group was set up by her and Keith.

Jo gets a notification when people post photos to the new group, and then she shares the photos on the main Facebook page. Having a separate Facebook group means that a record of park biodiversity and landscape can be kept in one place for easy reference, as well as allowing people to get the pleasure from posting their photos.

People climbing over the wildlife pond gate

Keith Blackwood mentioned that he had seen a man and two boys climbing over the gate to enter the fenced off area surrounding the pond. This is not the first time this has happened. Jo Smalley said that she could understand why people would be curious to get closer to the pond – and stand on the dipping platform. However, this is not to be encouraged and as Sam Walker (HBC) said there is a padlock on the gate and this really should indicate to members of the public that it is an area that is intended to be used only by invitation.

9) Proposed date for next meeting

The Friends' Group holds three public meetings a year. The AGM is proposed for Monday, 22 July at 7pm, venue to be confirmed. Mike Pyle announced that he is to stand down as Chairperson at the AGM, and asked for people to consider volunteering as his replacement. He thanked everyone for attending the meeting and said he looks forward to seeing them in July.

Ends.

