



Minutes of AGM and public meeting held on Monday, 22nd July 2019, 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, Paul Birtwhistle, Linda Nelson, Andrew Pinder.

Annual General Meeting

1) Chairperson's welcome/apologies

Mike Pyle welcomed members of the public to the meeting.

Apologies

Keith Blackwood, Richard Owen-Hughes, Trevor and Hilary Hopkinson, Matt Walker, Susan Langley, Marian Kempson.

2) Approval of the minutes of the last AGM held on Monday, 9 July 2018

Richard Williams proposed the minutes and Paul Birtwhistle seconded.

4) Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5) Election of officers

Mike Pyle is standing down as chairperson. Trevor and Hilary Hopkinson have agreed to be joint chairperson, but unfortunately due to prior commitments were unable to attend the meeting. There is no reason why the Friends' group cannot have a joint chair. They will, however, only have one vote between them.

The motion was proposed by Richard Williams and seconded by Jo Smalley.

Richard Williams will continue as treasurer, Jo Smalley as secretary and Elsa Wiehe as under-secretary. Mike Pyle is happy to continue being involved with the group and remains on the committee.

Jo Smalley thanked Mike for all his work over the years with the Friends of Jacob Smith Park. He has been involved with the Friends Group from the very start. When the previous Friends Group disbanded, Mike generously agreed to stay on to help and guide new members.

Richard Owen-Hughes will continue to audit accounts as he has done in previous years. The committee expressed their thanks for this support.

Chair's report 2018-2019

The park is well used and enjoyed by a broad spectrum of people. Dog walkers, runners, walkers, scouts, brownies, families, nature enthusiasts and photographers and more!

Thank you to the volunteer groups who are active with ongoing tree care and balsam bashing. This year there was an extra balsam bashing event on a summer evening, which proved helpful. Thanks also to all the members of the park community who don't attend volunteer events, but care for the place every time they visit.

It is very likely that the farmer will cut the hay this year. After a little hiccup at the start of the year, HBC's maintenance team cut the grass rides most satisfactorily. The delivery of woodchip to firm up the muddy entrance area in the winter was also very useful.

The wildlife pond has been surveyed and monitored by small groups with young people several times this year. The youngest oak trees are coming along nicely, including the two new replacement trees.

The website has been launched and is a great success (www.jacobsmithpark.co.uk). The new log benches are popular and much appreciated. Richard Williams sourced the logs and with Countryside Ranger Sam Walker's help, many volunteers helped to move them in place. Huge thanks to them. Not an easy task!

Mike Pyle thanked Jo Smalley for doing such a fantastic job and for her energy and vision regarding the park. He thanked Elsa Wiehe for taking the meeting minutes and general support, and Richard Williams for being so organised in his role as treasurer.

Mike Pyle also thanked HBC parks team and Countryside Ranger Sam Walker for ensuring that the park is well maintained, and for such a quick response to any requests.

Mike Pyle said he had been involved as a park volunteer for 10 years, which is a wonderful natural space and he is sure that it will continue to thrive. Hopefully, the range of users will continue to broaden to include even more members of the community, of all ages.

Another enhancement is the recently formed Friends of Jacob Smith Park Photo Group, where beautiful records of the wildlife and activities in the park are regularly posted on Facebook by talented local photographers. This does not replace the original Friends of Jacob Smith Park Facebook page, but adds to the park's social media presence and provides a forum to record wildlife and landscape in one dedicated place.

Treasurer's report 2018-2019

Richard Williams, Treasurer, summarised the Friends of Jacob s financial situation - and a copy of these accounts are available on request.

7) Any other business

There was no other business.

Public Meeting

1) Approval of the minutes of the last public meeting held on Monday, 11 March 2019

Richard Williams proposed approval of the minutes of the last public meeting and Andrew Pinder seconded.

2) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3) Maintenance

Tree aftercare

Jo Smalley has been watering the five new oaks with her children this year. Two trees that were planted had died last year and were replaced by Countryside Ranger Sam Walker. All trees are now thriving. Sam Walker thanked Jo Smalley and her children for their diligent watering. Hilary and Trevor Hopkinson have also been helping.

Grass cutting

The grass cuts are now going well and the park is on course, thanks to HBC's parks team.

Hay cutting

It is hoped that the farmer, who cut the hay last year, and has a license with HBC, will take the hay again this year. He even suggested cutting the hay twice in one year, which would help the park's spread of wild flowers. It has been a very good year for orchids in the top meadow.

Sycamore trees

The sycamores in the park along the Scotch George wall, highlighted for potential felling, will not be removed at this present time. There were concerns by HBC consultants about the trees' impact on the integrity of the wall. Instead, the section of the wall where they are growing, will be photographed and monitored.

Young Friends of the park noticed that another part of the wall, near the top left pond, was crumbling. They took photographs of the damage and sent them to Countryside Ranger Sam Walker, who alerted his colleagues and repairs were soon made. Thanks to our young people for being so observant and proactive.

Manhole cover

Thanks are due to Keith Blackwood, who gave up his time to use soil to fill in the depression around the manhole cover on the right-hand-side of the park.

Himalayan Balsam

At Andrew Pinder's suggestion, Jo Smalley organised an evening Balsam bash session this year, as well as several Sundays, to give more people a chance to volunteer. Knaresborough Rotary Club joined in and the events were very pleasant and productive. The clearing activity was concentrated on the inside of the pond area, and radiated outwards from there.

Dave Christie had a couple of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) work volunteer days, and chose to use this time pulling out balsam in the park. The Friends Group is very grateful to Dave and all this year's volunteers – and to all the people who don't attend the sessions but pull out the balsam on their park visits.

If the hay cut is timed correctly, this will help to stop Himalayan Balsam from encroaching.

Countryside Ranger Sam Walker was unfortunately not able to trim the large areas he has done in the past. He mentioned that several friends groups, across his patch, have started to carry out the strimming themselves. Paul Birstwhistle volunteered to do some next year and to teach Jo Smalley how to do it. This will need to be risk assessed by Jo Smalley.

A couple who live in one of the new houses abutting the park met Jo Smalley at a balsam bash event. They explained to her that they are creating a meadow in their garden. They suggested they could trim part of the park closest to their property, to reduce the amount of Himalayan Balsam. Again this would need to be risk assessed and before that, Countryside Ranger Sam and members of the Friends Group would need to meet with the couple to agree on a way forward, taking into account the park's best interests.

Oak saplings that have self-seeded in the pond area will be transplanted in the autumn and grown in pots as replacement saplings, to be planted back into the park as and when required. Saplings in the pond area are not desirable due to the increased leaf litter they bring, which can be a contributing factor to the pond silting up.

4) Enhancements

Hedging

There were plans to restore the old hedge that grows near the entrance gate by infilling any gaps with native species. Countryside Ranger Sam Walker had initially come up with this idea, supported by the Friends Group, but now doesn't want to take it further due to this work potentially changing views of the park. Jo Smalley pointed out that many ancient hedgerows in our area are being lost to developments and wildlife corridors are shrinking. Ecologist Bernadette Lobo's planting plan for the park will be revisited, to see what was recommended regarding hedgerow enhancement.

Community wildlife pond

The pond has had an exciting year. Mike Pyle's fears of it drying up have luckily been unfounded. Despite a very dry spell, the pond continued to be fed by a natural source.

In March, a group of volunteer adults and children from The Friends Group enjoyed a basic pond ecology session, delivered by Andrew Westgarth of Quantum Ecology. They did a crepuscular dip, with equipment fundraised for by the Group, and found many species of interest. The volunteers also assisted Andrew in carrying out a Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index Survey. The results pointed to the pond being an excellent potential home for newts. Andrew also brought along a bat detector and Common Pipistrelles were heard, and then seen flitting above the pond and eating insects at dusk.

An extension to the board walk is still needed. This will cost in the region of £700, which is quite cost effective in view of the labour, materials and use of a mechanical digger. Initially, £400 was budgeted but Richard Williams, Treasurer, advised that the work go ahead nonetheless.

Work cannot be carried out until after the November 1st, due to the presence of Great Crested Newts. A recent eDNA test for their presence came back positive. Countryside Ranger Sam Walker will need a purchase order before work on the platform extension can proceed. Jo Smalley will action.

A second supervised pond dip took place in June and baby newts (efts) were discovered. Jo Smalley and Elsa Wiehe will need Natural England Science and Conservation licenses in order to conduct future pond dips, due to the exciting news that Great Crested Newts are present in the pond. Sam Walker will advise. Two dipping events a year for small groups of children are planned. The wildlife in the pond must be respected and preserved - hence dipping must be carried out only under supervision, by trained Friends Group volunteers. May and June are good times for this activity. Jo Smalley will sort out the necessary risk assessment for supervised pond dipping, and asked Richard Williams to check that the Friends Group's public liability insurance fully covered the activity.

Interpretation board

Jo Smalley reported that £2,400 of the £4,200 required has been raised, leaving £1,800 to fund. Knaresborough Town Council has donated £700, and Knaresborough Lions pledged £1,000. HBC will cover VAT costs of £700.

Countryside Ranger Sam Walker mentioned that he had discovered £7,000 was previously ring fenced for Jacob Smith Park by HBC. Sam can probably access this fund for the rest of the interpretation board funds, and other projects that the Friends Group would like to take forward in the future. This includes a newt hibernaculum and possible balsam management measures. Sam will investigate and get back to Jo Smalley.

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Log seats

Countryside Ranger Sam Walker felt that there was room in the park for one more log seat. The Friends Group agrees and this idea will be explored.

5) Any other business

There was no other business.

6) Proposed date for next public meeting

The date of the next public meeting of the Friends of Jacob Smith Park is Monday, 18 November 2019 at 7pm. Venue to be confirmed.

Ends

