



Minutes of the public meeting held on Monday, 18 November 2019 at 7pm at the Commercial Inn, Knaresborough

Present: Trevor and Hilary Hopkinson (Chairpersons), Richard Williams (Treasurer), Jo Smalley (Secretary), Elsa Wiehe (Under-Secretary), Paul Birtwhistle, Will Easton, Mike Cope, Keith Blackwood, Nick Stanier and Melissa Milner.

1) Chairperson's welcome

The Friend Group's new Chairpersons, Hilary and Trevor Hopkinson, introduced themselves and welcomed everyone to the meeting. They have been living in Knaresborough for the past five years and are incredibly fond of Jacob Smith Park. When they heard the news that Mike Pyle was stepping down as Chair, due to having been a volunteer with the Friends Group since it began in 2008, and his increasing Knaresborough Lions commitments, they were keen to help in a shared Chairperson role when approached. In this shared role, if a committee vote was required, their vote would count as one vote - i.e. husband and wife would not be able to vote separately - they would have a shared vote.

2) Apologies

Mike Pyle, Patience Dawson, Karen and Phil Milward, Sharon Pinder and HBC Countryside Park Ranger Sam Walker, who unfortunately couldn't attend at very short notice. However, the points he made at an earlier meeting with the committee can be discussed, concerning various aspects of the park's maintenance.

3) Approval of the minutes of the last public meeting held on Monday, 22nd July 2019.

Proposed by Richard Williams and seconded by Paul Birtwhistle.

4) Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

Melissa Milner, an HBC employee, came to speak about a project she is leading on called "Walkies for Wellbeing", which currently takes place on the last two Tuesdays of each month, from 1-30pm to 3pm at Knaresborough Community Centre on Stockwell Avenue.

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Although Melissa had not been formally invited by the committee and added to the agenda, the Friends Group was pleased to welcome her and hear her speak before the rest of the meeting took place.

“Walkies and Wellbeing” is one of several projects set up to promote community cohesion and wellbeing. There are no age restrictions and dog ownership is not necessary! Each meeting consists of light refreshments for owners, and treats for the dogs whilst enjoying useful talks about the positive aspects of dog ownership. Owners can also share their experiences if they wish and swap tips on the pros and cons of being a dog owner. This includes: employing professional dog walkers, the best kennels and the legalities of microchipping. People who are considering getting a dog, might also be interested in coming along, as they can learn more about dogs and meet some, before committing themselves. Melissa left flyers with the group and asked if the Friends of Jacob Smith Park would be kind enough to promote the project. Jo Smalley said she would be delighted to do this on behalf of the Friends.

Another scheme, developed by Melissa called “Cook and Eat”, involves people of all ages making meals together from food (donated from local supermarkets), that would have ended up as waste. Those members of the community taking part, then enjoy the social aspect of eating the food they have prepared together. All details can be found on Knaresborough Community Centre’s website or social media pages.

5) Treasurer’s report

The Treasurer said that the Friends’ finances were in a healthy state and gave a verbal report. In round figures, at the beginning of the financial year, the bank balance was £3,249. There have been four generous donations of £20 from Friends, and a very generous donation of £1,000 from Knaresborough Lions. A total of £80 was spent on public liability insurance, £616 on equipment for pond dipping and £45 for hosting the website. This left a bank balance of £3,589. There was also £31 cash in hand, and the committee spent £9 on envelopes and stamps, leaving £22.

So in total, current funds are £3,611. Richard said that with other funds already pledged by Harrogate Borough Council, there was sufficient money to cover all current projects, mainly the dipping platform boardwalk extension, the hibernaculum and the interpretation board.

6) Maintenance:

Grass cutting

The grass cutting has gone according to plan this year. Vince from HBC parks team is doing a wonderful job so far.

Hay cutting

The farmer cut the meadows, but was only able to take away some of the hay risings due to the atrocious weather. He braved the UCI event traffic with his massive baler, but then unfortunately couldn’t get the machine through the main park gates. He returned later on

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with a smaller machine and worked into the night, with lights on, until the heavens opened and he was forced to give up!

A public hay raking volunteer event was scheduled a while later, to gather up and dispose of the remaining hay risings in the very top field, but this was also abandoned due to the levels of flooding in the park.

Thankfully a few days later, once the park was drier, Jo Smalley and a team of very hardworking volunteers (including young Friends) managed to rake up the sodden hay from the top field. Other families, who were in the park, on seeing what was going on, returned with their own rakes and helped under Jo's supervision. Jo expressed her enormous thanks to all ages who put in a great deal of effort to look after the park.

If the hay was not cut, the parkland would turn into scrubland. If the cut hay is not removed, it will rot down and this ultimately increases the soil fertility. This is not conducive to the growth of wildflowers in the meadows, something the Friends Group is trying to promote.

Hopefully, the farmer will cut the grass in the park for hay next year, and have better luck with the weather. However, if the weather is very wet, volunteers would be able to remove around 70 percent of risings, if not more, in the top field like they did this year. This area of the park's 30 acres, is the most promising for a perennial wildflower meadow.

Woodchips

Before HBC Countryside Ranger Sam Walker went on leave, he said he would deliver more woodchip to spread at the entrance of the park. We need to ask him again, or a colleague, and look at extending the area where the woodchips are spread.

Pedestrian entrance

Keith Blackwood noticed that the bolt had come out of the frame on the gate. This was pointed out to HBC Countryside Ranger Sam Walker, who fixed it promptly. Jo Smalley said that thanks are due to Sam and his team for dealing with enquiries in a timely manner.

Himalayan Balsam

There were three successful 'Balsam Bashes' this year, including one in an evening to give other volunteers a chance to attend. However, next year, the approach to managing the invasive non-native species and stopping it encroaching, will be slightly different. Though some balsam is useful for the bees, it needs to be managed so it does not prevent the spread of native plant species.

Using some funds from HBC, that have been ring-fenced for the park, it might be worthwhile sending four volunteers on an approved strimmer training course, and then hiring a strimmer for regular balsam management. In previous years, HBC Countryside Ranger Sam Walker has strimmed large areas of balsam in the park to thin it out, with much success. However, nowadays, HBC requires him to work on sites which are in stewardship, like Quarry Moor and High Batts nature reserves, generating an income. This means he will not have the capacity in the foreseeable future to do this job in the park. As volunteers, The

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Friends of Jacob Smith Park, must bite the bullet and crack on with an action plan. More volunteers are needed to help make this a success. Anyone interested in getting involved should contact Jo Smalley by emailing: friends@jacobsmithpark.co.uk

Kev Smalley would be willing to go on the training course, and hopefully several others too. Although volunteer Paul Birtwhistle, who has many years' experience working in the parks team, has kindly offered to do some strimming, it is too much work for one person.

Trevor Hopkinson mentioned that there was the question of public liability insurance cover. Presumably certification of the training would have to be shown to be covered. Richard Williams said he had already asked the Friends' insurance company, and a representative had ensured him that we would be covered for such events under the existing policy.

Nick Stanier said that in his village there is an annual "Cake and Rake" event that takes place in the local churchyard, where the grass and weeds are strimmed, and bushes cut back. People bring their own tools and it is a lot cheaper than hiring them.

However, it was pointed out that HBC, owner of the parkland, might not agree to people using their own strimmers for health and safety reasons.

Tree saplings

Mike Pyle has volunteered to dig up the saplings that have self-seeded around the wildlife pond area. Their falling leaves will silt up the pond and they will eventually cast undesirable shade. The saplings can be planted elsewhere in the park as necessary.

Replacement tree fencing

HBC funding of £7,000 has been earmarked for use in the park. HBC Countryside Ranger Sam Walker has explained that, whilst the Friends could use some of this cash for the group's projects to enhance the park, HBC intends to use a proportion of the funds to replace the fences around the ancient trees. Dates for this work to be carried out are not known.

Park flooding

Trevor Hopkinson said that a stream originating from a nearby spring enters at the corner of the park, and flows to the fence line. A culvert was constructed for this stream, connected to the park drainage system through a six inch pipe, which is inadequate for the flow. HBC has no legal responsibility for any flooding, but the culvert is to be inspected in the near future. It is not blocked at the moment.

There is no point installing a bigger culvert as this would only move the flooding problem further along, where it is more likely to impact on local housing. Besides, no one would pay for it. In the event of flooding, HBC and NYCC Highways will provide sandbags as needed.

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The Friends would like to create another wetland area to soak up the excess water, if possible. The feasibility of taking this forward is yet to be discussed, as it is very much an idea in its infancy.

The year 2016 was a bad year for flooding, and this could be repeated ever more often with climate change. Water even came through the gateway out of the park to flow into the road drains. Where the grouting in the park's stone boundary wall was poor, the excess water forced its way through and went onto the road.

Perhaps the actual drains in the road need to be inspected more regularly?

7) Enhancements

Community wildlife pond project

The viewing platform for the wildlife pond has been extended. As the level of the water in the pond is very high and risks rotting the timber of the dipping platform, HBC Countryside Ranger Sam Walker is considering installing a drain.

Keith Blackwood and Paul Birtwhistle reported seeing three kingfishers at the pond at one time! Kingfishers can supplement their fish diets with newts and other amphibians. The Friends Group is hoping that the pond's inhabitants have sufficient hiding places! It is wonderful to welcome these beautiful birds to the park.

Hilary Hopkinson and her friend Shirley spotted some mandarin ducks, as well as the resident mallard and the moorhens.

Funds have also been allocated for the installation of a newt hibernaculum at the pond.

Interpretation board

There is enough money from the £7,000 fund to make up the shortfall needed to pay for the board. Jo Smalley will start work on this in the new year.

Keith Blackwood and Paul Birtwhistle asked about the images for the interpretation board. Jo Smalley said that it is hoped to use some of the beautiful photos taken by volunteers like Keith and Paul. However, no promises can be made as she has no idea how the photos will transfer onto the board, and how much the images taken by volunteers can be blown up, before they would look too grainy.

Jo Smalley said that the trustees of the park and HBC need to approve the contents of the interpretation board, and she would share it with everyone before finalising the design. Jo cannot give a deadline for the completion of the board at the moment, due to her own family commitments and the signing off process with partner agencies.

The Knaresborough Lions, Knaresborough Town Council and HBC have all kindly donated money towards the board and will have their logos on it, alongside the Friends of Jacob Smith Park logo.

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Log seats

The two newly installed log seats have proved very successful and are well loved and used. HBC Countryside Ranger Sam Walker thinks that there is scope for one more bench. The Friends of Jacob Smith Park committee agrees. A possible location is on the right-hand side of the “cross roads” (which is at the bottom of the big hill as you travel to it from the main entrance), in a place where it would not impede sledging.

One of the older log seats (on the left-hand side of the large mown area) is showing a little bit of rot but still has a long life ahead of it.

Hedgerow planting

A lot of planting has taken place over the last five years by The Friends of Jacob Smith Park and HBC colleagues, as part of a wildlife corridor. Any planting that has failed needs to be identified, and The Friends would like to infill the gaps. Committee members intend to walk around the wildlife corridor perimeter with HBC Countryside Ranger Sam Walker in the new year, to investigate further.

Website update

A new section of the website is now dedicated to pond education, including the species which have been sighted so far. For more details visit www.jacobsmithpark.co.uk

8) Any other business

Keith Blackwood was asked by someone in the park, what the pond dipping platform is used for. It was installed for several important reasons - firstly, so the Friends group can monitor the pond and its inhabitants, and secondly as an educational tool to allow young people to take part in pond dipping activities, where appropriate. In accordance with the aims of the trustees and HBC, it allows The Friends group to expand the use of the park for educational purposes.

Having the platform means that regular recording and logging of freshwater species can be carried out, especially those in serious decline throughout the UK due to freshwater habitats being in much shorter supply. For example, species including the highly endangered Great Crested Newt, (whose eDNA has already been identified at the park’s pond), and various other aquatic species. The platform means trained volunteers can reach further out into the pond, to carry out vital species and habitat checks. In this way, species can be supported and helped to survive.

Next year, Jo Smalley and Elsa Wiehe will apply to Natural England for Science and Conservation licences so they are able to handle Great Crested Newts, and will be able to organise pond dipping sessions, where appropriate, for local youngsters.. Hopefully, the children will learn to appreciate this wonderful habitat and respect the creatures, both the more obvious ones like newts and amphibians, but also the smaller insects and aquatic creatures.

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It also demonstrates that the park is not just a field for dog walkers, as it has been accused of many times in the past. It is a wildlife habitat as well, and a place that is well loved by all the public, and used by all the community.

Jo Smalley replied that we have been very lucky so far in terms of funding.

Keith Blackwood brought up the health and safety aspects of people entering and exiting the park. Cars are shooting across the road outside, and visibility is very poor. This is often due to cars that are inconsiderately parked. Could we have speed bumps installed? It is the Friends Group's remit to help look after what goes on inside the park - i.e. ensuring maintenance is carried out and working on enhancement projects. The highways are NYCC's responsibility. Could this problem be brought up at a local neighbourhood watch meeting, or at a safer neighbourhood's meeting? Maybe local residents' groups could encourage people to contact their local councillors about this issue.

The question was raised - what does "keep your dog under close control" mean in the park? It would seem that part of this confusion is due to the park's HBC noticeboard having a sign on it with a dog on a lead. The Friends Group would hope people realise that being a considerate dog owner and park user, means keeping your dog in close sight, at a distance that ensures they could be popped on a lead quickly if needed. It is also hoped that owners would make sure their dogs are trained in good recall, not allowing their pets to run up to other park users and annoy/intimidate them. Having a dog under close control also means that the owner can be certain that they have been responsible in picking up their pet's faeces.

Hilary Hopkinson suggested that a railing could be installed outside the pedestrian gate to stop children running straight out onto the road. This could be similar to the one that is installed at the top of the path that abuts onto Blind Lane.

9) Proposed date of next meeting

A date for the next public meeting cannot be confirmed yet. HBC Countryside Ranger Sam Walker can no longer attend the meetings on a Monday evening due to personal commitments, so a change in the day to meet is required, and will be decided on shortly.

ENDS

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