



NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026

75th anniversary commemoration

In 1947 Pontefract Borough Council approved a plan to create a public park in the Friarwood Valley, acquiring several privately owned market garden plots. On 16th March 1950, a flowering cherry tree was planted to commemorate the commencement of the work to create Friarwood Valley Gardens. A stone plaque records the event, and the flowering cherry continues to provide a stunning display of blossom every spring. In April 2025 we planted a new flowering cherry tree (Prunus Kanzan) close by to commemorate the 75th anniversary, and this year is the 75th anniversary of the official opening.



Yorkshire in Bloom Gold Award

Yorkshire in Bloom judges visited the Valley Gardens in July and we were very pleased to be awarded Gold in the Parks, Gardens and Cemeteries category, Summer 2025 for the second year in succession.



The judges report stated, "The group were proud and enthusiastic to showcase all elements of the park commenting on past achievements as well as new initiatives such as the newly erected archway at the entrance and the engraved liquorice poem panel... The extensive rose garden was a joy to see." "Overall, a wonderful green space only minutes away from the town centre which offers a peaceful and usable space in equal measure."



More additions to the playground



Restored metal bench



A double seesaw and Sid-the-Snake bench were two new additions to the playground last year. Look out for more new play equipment early this year, all paid for from the proceeds of Friarwood Festival. The playground was built more than 10 years ago and the protective rubber matting on the ground needs replacing. We plan to install rubber bonded mulch underneath the play equipment to provide a safer and more efficient surface. The new play equipment and playground surface should be in place for the summer.

Benches replaced

In 2024 12 park benches were removed following fire damage perpetrated by vandalism, and a further two were burnt in May last year. All 14 have been repaired in metal by DC Fabrications, and 12 have been reinstalled by the Park Ranger Team. Eight of the benches were memorials and the original dedication plaques have been replaced. Two more will be installed soon. Fortunately, the cost of the renovations has been paid for by the Council's fire insurance.

Summer events 2025



Yorkshire Day in the Valley Gardens

We celebrated Yorkshire Day, 1st August, with a family gala day, blessed by good weather which brought out the crowds. The regular attractions were there: Professor Dan with Punch and Judy, donkeys and bouncy castle and slide, as well as other activities for the kids. We did not hold an event for Pontefract Liquorice Festival last year. Friends of Friarwood Valley Gardens had run a Liquorice Festival gala day since 2013, but the committee decided that there were insufficient funds and volunteers to run two summer events close together.

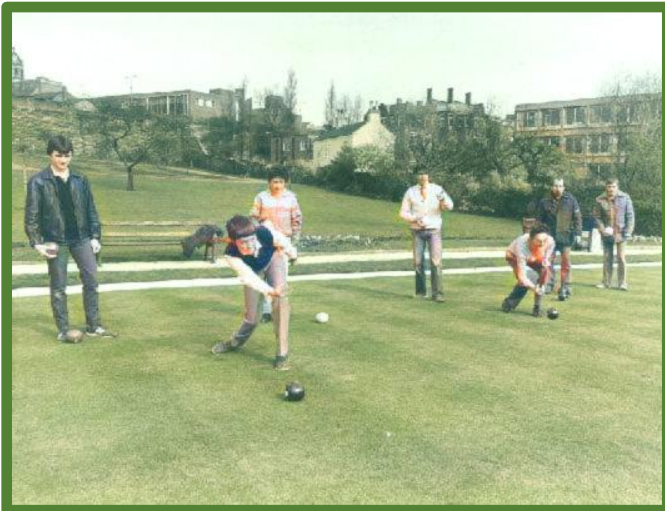
Friarwood Festival 9th August 2025

This was the seventh Friarwood Festival since the first one in 2018 and was the most successful, attracting a capacity crowd. The safe capacity of our limited space is 4,000, and to ensure control of numbers, it is a ticketed event.



The cost of delivering Friarwood Festival is nearly £15,000, but we keep the price of tickets as low as possible. Friarwood Festival is now organised by a committee separate to Friends of Friarwood Valley Gardens but is still committed to investing surplus funds into the Valley Gardens. Friarwood Festival has paid for improvements to the playground in the past two years.

Bowling Green



Valley Gardens bowling: 1960s

The bowling green was opened by the Mayor of Pontefract in 1954 and there had been a bowling club in the Valley Gardens until spring 2024 when it wound up. Since then, Friends of Friarwood Valley Gardens have had use of the bowling green enclosure and pavilion. The Council are still maintaining the green but may not continue to do so if it isn't being used. We have identified that there is interest in continuing crown green bowling in the Valley Gardens and the plan is to provide volunteer led recreational bowling two days a week initially from March, weather permitting. If there is sufficient interest, a separate bowling group could

be established. The green is in good condition, one of the best in the district; scarification and top dressing was carried out by the Council in October. It would be a shame to lose this amenity, and we want to encourage more younger people and families take up crown green bowling.

Covid Circle of Hope refreshed

The Covid Circle of Hope was installed in 2020 and after 5 years was looking sad. Fortunately, 41st Pontefract Guides were keen to help restore it and decorate the stones. Before and after:



41st Pontefract Guides busy on 1st July 2025

Park Ranger Team

The Council's Park Ranger Team are in the Valley Gardens most days of the week and do a great job.



Working with the Park Ranger Team

We are very appreciative of the support that we get from the park rangers; they have helped us with tree planting, border clearance and edging of the rose beds, for instance.

New Trees

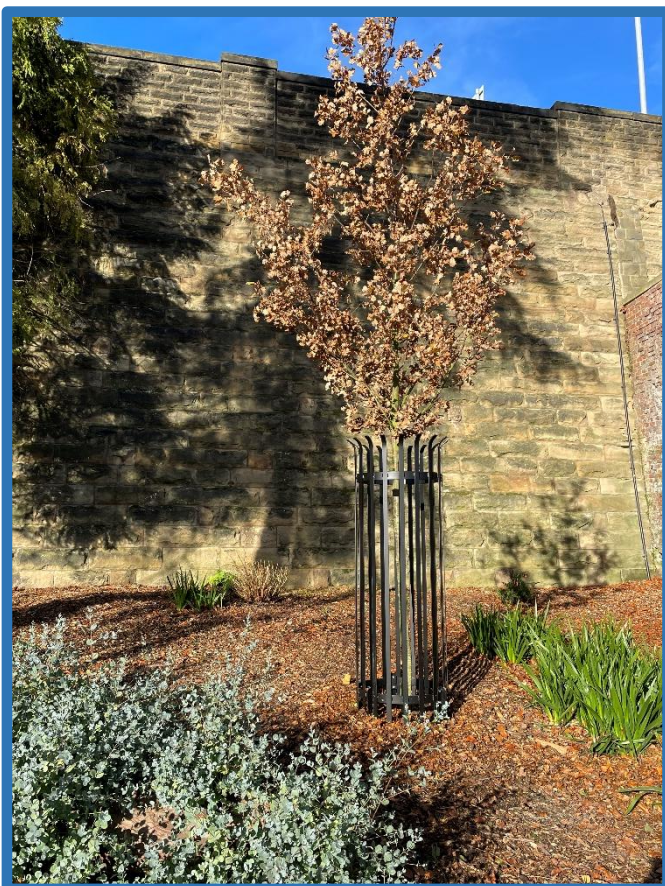


Flowering cherry



Caramel tree

Three new trees were planted last year, the commemorative flowering cherry and caramel tree (Katsura) at the north west end, and a common oak at the north east corner of the Rose Garden to replace the eucalyptus that fell down in July, damaging the Bluebell Steps wall.



Common Oak

Volunteer Activities

Our small team of volunteers is active throughout the year. Our regular gardening session is every Saturday 2 - 4pm, and litter picking 1st Sunday of each month at 10.30am. New volunteers always welcome. We do arrange sessions on other days and will notify them on Facebook and Citizen Coin (citizencoin.co.uk). You can earn citizen coins by volunteering with us, and use the coins for discounts in participating local businesses and Aspire @ the Park.



Spring blossom, ferns planted at cul-de-sac end and flower bed spring and summer.

Events 2026

Easter Egg Trail for pre-school children:
Wednesday 25th March 1 – 2.30pm

Yorkshire Day: Saturday 1st August, family gala.

Friarwood Festival: Saturday 8th August.

We will also be having a spring blossom day in April and a celebration to commemorate 75 years since Friarwood Valley Gardens was officially opened in 1951. Dates to be announced later.

We always need volunteers to help us with gardening and events, so please contact us if you can help.

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfFriarwoodValleyGardensPontefract>

Citizen Coin: <https://www.citizencoin.uk/>

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Website:

<https://e-voice.org.uk/friendsoffriarwoodvalleygardens>