



Friends of Rising Sun Country Park Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 May 2023

Present: Claire Partleton (Chair), Keith Taylor (Secretary), Vivien Fenn-Webber, Janet Weatherburn, Amanda Williams, Ian Hogg (McDonalds), Chris Tallack (North Tyneside Council – NTC)

Apologies: Eric Styan, Jan Casson, Pixie Phelan (NTC), Stephen Gibbinson (NTC), Jill Potts (Northumberland Estates)

Update on recent activities

Despite the poor weather there was another good turnout for the **litter-pick** on 24 April. Representatives from Living to Learn and the Newcastle Building Society were in attendance along with many of our regular helpers. Thank you to all who took part. **Next event is on 29 May.**

The City Nature Challenge took place from 28 April to 1 May and the group was represented by Claire, Jan, Ros and Alex who took part in a range of activities which included bird observations and photography, pond dipping and a bat survey. Over 220 observations were recorded and the group improved from last year's seventh position, to fourth this year for the number of observations, and joint fourth for the different species recorded. Results are on the Noticeboard in the foyer. A special mention goes to Paul H, who recorded 23 observations of 20 species, 10 of which were different to those recorded by the group. Well done to all!

The allotment has seen a good deal of work this month, with improvements to the paths by means of significant weeding, and the laying of membrane and quarry dust covering. A new compost bin has been erected, and there has been plenty of planting of fruit and vegetable plants.

Matters arising from the April Meeting

Chippings for the Wigloo structure in the Wildlife Garden: We're not optimistic about receiving any offers of donations via Facebook therefore Claire agreed to contact a few tree surgeons to see if they could donate any. If this is unsuccessful, the group voted unanimously to purchase some. **(AP1: to review at next meeting).** Unfortunately, one of the cherry trees planted earlier this year has been damaged, although the other is thriving.

Interpretation Boards and Signage: NTC is looking at how Section 106 money for signage will be used. The aim is to address the boards and signage generally across the whole park.

Voluntary Organisations Development Agency (VODA) Grant: Our application for funds in the sum of £ 460.00 has been submitted and we've been advised that we can expect to hear back very quickly. The application had to specify exactly what any funding would be used for and if anyone would like to see a copy of the application, Claire has this available electronically and Keith has a paper copy. **(AP2: review at next meeting).**

Remembering the Past: Claire continues to explore the heritage of the park and has been in touch with a local historian, Rob McGinley, who has previously led walks around the park, focussing on its coal-mining past. Vivien has also unearthed more documents, which she shared with the group at the meeting. Although there was a “then and now” event held in 2013, it would seem that most of the Council’s material has been lost during various premises re-locations. **(AP3: review at next meeting).**

NTC event on 16 August 2023: Among other attractions, there will be a Scarecrow Trail for families to follow, with small prizes being awarded, and we believe there will be entries from the Brownies, Guides, Asda and McDonalds, as well as ourselves. Vivien has some quiz-type games which she will bring in. We need ideas for fund-raising (jumble, bric-a brac etc) but we need to bear in mind that people attending will have already paid to attend the events, and other groups are likely to be doing fund-raising activities of their own. **(AP4: review at next meeting).**

The Friends’ Calendar: The advert has gone out for people to submit their photos for possible inclusion, and there is a poster on the Noticeboard. We haven’t had any entries yet, so can we consider extending the deadline for the submission of entries, and seek contributions at the event on 16 August. **(AP5: review at next meeting).**

Independent Audit of the Accounts: Eric has had the figures reviewed and signed off by a former colleague, although it appears he is not from a financial background, which is what is usually required. In addition, in order to be able to make applications for further funding, we may well be required to provide the statement written by the person carrying out the audit, which, at the moment, we do not have. There is a Charity Commission report template which, if completed, would satisfy these requirements, but we are not a Registered Charity. Keith agreed to make some enquiries as to the pros and cons of seeking to become a Registered Charity for the future and will report back. **(AP6: review at next meeting).** New money boxes for donations have been obtained and one of these will be placed in the canteen.

New Rope Fence in the wildlife garden: Following a discussion with the Education Team, their view was that instead of this, we could erect what is known as a “dead hedge”. Apart from there being no cost, as we would be using materials collected from around the park, it would be more environmentally and nature friendly. Claire will circulate the details. **(AP7: review at next meeting).**

Obtaining feedback from the Park’s users: NTC does not currently have a suggestions box, and it seems there are no plans to introduce them. The Friends’ group will not be taking this idea forward.

Volunteering Policies: NTC has introduced a new volunteering application form, and Claire has been speaking to Pixie to highlight the gaps in the process and to see which policy documents need to be introduced or updated. **(AP8: review at next meeting).**

Northumberland Estates: With them not being in attendance, there were no updates. Claire is aware of a complaint having been submitted regarding the cutting-back of the vegetation around the stream running to Duke’s Pond.

Treasurer's Report: The Easter Egg raffle generated £ 75.00, and duck food sales and other donations means we now have £ 3,935.88 in the bank and £ 71.94 cash in hand. Eric has received an invoice for payment from Victory Signs, which is actually proper to NTC. Claire will pass the details onto Chris.

Other Business:

The current position as regards the farm is that prospective investors have been invited to "open days" on May 24 and 25, by prior appointment only. The meeting agreed that the farm is a significant feature of the wider park area, and was keen to see that there should be a good working relationship with all groups with a presence on the site. The recent Council elections would appear to have made no change in terms of the overall make-up of the Council, in case the support of any Councillor was being considered.

Claire has met with Reverend Dr Rae Caro, from St Marks' Church. She is part of the Rising Sun Neighbours Group and would like to re-establish contact after a period of absence. The Group is looking to hold events in the park to support the community, and she would like to attend our meetings when her commitments permit.

The Friends' Group advertisement for new volunteers will appear in the next issue of the NTC magazine – in the Summer.

To reduce pressure on the cafe staff, as they get busier during the better weather, we can use the staff kitchen to prepare our own drinks. We can also organise cupboard space to keep our own supplies. **(AP9: review at next meeting).**

We don't currently have a website: Claire has been made aware of a number of sites which offer free website building for community groups and wondered if this was something we could explore. This was agreed and Claire will report back. Our Facebook page is currently recording 570 members. **(AP10: review at next meeting).**

A suggestion was made that the next meeting should be our Annual General Meeting. This was agreed and will be advertised accordingly.

Next Meeting: AGM: Friday 9 June 2023, 12 midday @ Countryside Centre, RSCP