



**Friends of Rising Sun Country Park**  
**Meeting with Neil Hodgson (Operations Manager – Horticulture and Parks)**  
**Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

**Present:** Neil Hodgson (NTC), Janet Weatherburn, Jan Casson, Dennis Nelson, Pat Nelson, Eric Styan (Treasurer), Ian Hogg (McDonalds), Michelle & Lisa (ASDA), David Gordon (NTC), Claire Partleton (Chair)

**Apologies:** Keith Page (Secretary), Vivien Fenn-Webber, Janice Robson, Michael Day, Val Watson, Keith Taylor

Neil Hodgson is the newly appointed Operations Manager for Horticulture & Parks within North Tyneside Council. He kindly agreed to meet with the Friends Group to answer questions relating to our ongoing and future role in the support of the Rising Sun Country Park.

**Questions and matters arising from the meeting**

**Is the Friends Group valued by NTC?** – Yes. Friends Groups and volunteers have an incredibly important role in the running of NTC parks. NTC have very few dedicated parks staff to maintain the grounds, organise events, deal with issues, plan and implement improvements and provide an experience that park users will want to keep returning too. The Park Team could not do this without the help and contributions from volunteers and Friends Groups. The FORSCP have added a huge contribution towards the running of the park and add real value over and above what the council can offer.

**Are we just a tick in a box to help gain Green Flag status?** – No, whilst the Green Flag judges do like to see Friends Group as part of the community involvement within the park, FORSCP brings additional value above and beyond what is needed; it was acknowledged that without Friends active involvement, the Park would struggle to maintain its Green Flag Status.

**What is NTC's vision for FORSCP?** – NTC has undergone some management changes over the past year and is still recovering from the legacy of covid restrictions and unprecedented visitor numbers within the park. The question was mirrored to the group – 'What is the vision of FORSCP'? It was acknowledged, by all, that now is the time to plan future steps and structure how the FORSCP can move forward with support from NTC. It was agreed that a separate planning meeting should be convened to progress a combined 'vision for the future', which encompasses the objects of FORSCP, and a program of tasks based on NTC management plan for the park.

**Location and Timing of FORSCP Meetings** – It was agreed that FORSCP meetings will continue to take place at noon, on the second Friday of each month and will be held in the Exhibition Room.

**NTC attendance at FORSCP Meetings** – It was proposed that Stephen Gibbinson (Team Leader- Facilities) and David Gordon (Team Leader – Parks) will attend the meeting. If either are unable to attend, they will be deputised by Graeme Sample and Chris Tallack respectively. Neil suggested in the exceptional circumstances that the deputies were unable to attend then he could attend, or that the meeting should be postponed until another date.

**Communication** – NTC team leader meetings have been re-established so more information from a cooperate level should be available, and with both Team Leaders now in attendance at FORSCP meetings they will be able to pass on any relevant details affecting the group.

**Volunteering issues** – Volunteering is to return formally. All new volunteers should be directed to DG, who will be co-ordinating volunteering.

Volunteering sessions will take place on Thursday mornings from 10:00 am, with additional sessions planned if demand requires. No volunteer or member of FORSCP should be carrying out unsupervised repair jobs either within the centre grounds or in the wider park; this is due to insurance issues, safety issues and lone working policies within NTC. Anyone wanting to work in the park should attend the formal volunteering session on Thursday 10:00 am and be led by CT and GS. An exception to this would be the gardening group, although no one participating in this group should carry out major work alone.

A program of tasks will be generated, based on the parks management plan with a list of supervised and possible unsupervised tasks and general tasks that can be completed by the group in a voluntary capacity. Any unsupervised tasks must be planned, the volunteer must follow NTC procedure and be signed in and out by NTC staff member. It is a possibility that Elaine (Centre Coordinator) will take responsibility for coordinating this once she has settled into her role.

NTC RSCP management plan 2020-2025 was made available to FORSCP. CP to distribute copies to ES and KP.

**Events** – NTC-led park events will be returning slowly. It is envisaged that a return to a full program will not be until next year, although there maybe a possibility of Santa's Grotto running this Christmas. There will be smaller, external events taking place over summer e.g., Bikeability and Active Fun Days and information for these events will be passed on to FORSCP when confirmed. Elaine will be responsible for communicating event details, as part of her role as centre coordinator.

NH is happy for FORSCP to run its own events and has confirmed that DG & SG will provide help with any pre-event meetings, discuss needs and directions for any events the group wish to run. NTC are limited by staffing numbers/availability/costs but will support the group where possible.

**Section 106** – this was touched on very briefly with NH and DG confirming that plans are moving forward with regards tree thinning. Contractors are being sought to commence this work in October 2022 after nesting season.

**Rising Sun Farm** – NH listened to concerns raised by FORSCP over issues with a tree planting event that had taken place on land managed by the Rising Sun Farm Trust. It was highlighted that poor communication regarding public events, hosted by Northumberland Wildlife Trust had resulted in poor turn out, and a large quantity of unplanted trees remained in plastic bags in the field for weeks following the event. There was concern amongst members that these trees have now been planted in such poor condition it is probable they won't survive.

CP raised concerns over repeated incidents of farm livestock being loose in the park. FORSCP are anxious this ongoing risk to park users is not receiving appropriate attention from the Farm manger. It was the opinion of FORSCP that this should be raised more formally with the Rising Sun Farm Trust for the safety and welfare of both animals and park users, to prevent the potential for a more serious incident occuring in the future. CP agreed to email NH with further details.

**Date of Planning meeting - Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May at 10 am to be held in the Exhibition Room.**