



FRIENDS OF RISING SUN COUNTRY PARK

Chairperson's Report – 2022-2023

Writing the annual report is an opportunity to assess how well an organisation has performed against its aims over the year, which for Friends of Rising Sun Country Park are:

- to promote conservation, protection and improvements to the park environment by promoting biodiversity and wildlife habitats and,
- to advance the education of the local community on these areas while working in partnership with the council, local businesses/organisations as well as members of the public.

Taking time to review and reflect on the activities of the group over the past year, I was surprised at how much has been achieved in what has been a busy and exciting year for the Friends of Rising Sun Country Park.

Volunteering is at the heart of all our group activities. We are fortunate to have a small, but growing, crew of dedicated volunteers who freely give their time to support the park team. Over the past twelve months we have helped with several maintenance and conservation activities; repaired the footbridge over Lily Rose Pond and fences in the Wildlife Garden, tidied the Giant's Garden (more than once), maintained planters around the centre grounds and on the patio, mapped and assessed the condition of bird and bat boxes onsite, helped to clear ponds of debris and cut back overgrown vegetation. We have also learnt new skills, helping 'Burt the Thatcher' with repairs to the roundhouse in the Celtic Village! In summer 2022, we pulled together to help ensure the park was looking it's best when being re-assessed for Green Flag Status, which was successfully retained for another year! In addition, we have helped with bird box building with school groups and bulb planting with 1st Rising Sun brownies and guides. We have also worked with many corporate groups; EE, Virgin Media and Newcastle Building Society, on their volunteer days at park. A total of 1448 hours of volunteering were carried out at Rising Sun Country Park between May 2022-April 2023!

The creation of the new 'Wigloo' willow structure in the wildlife garden is something that the group should be proud of. A significant amount of preparation and planning was needed before we could begin this project, as we needed to remove the old, overgrown and unmanageable willow structures first. This was challenging work that took place in stages over the late summer and autumn, with the area finally being cleared and ready for the new structure by winter. The Friends are grateful to all volunteers who came to help and to Justine Holdsworth for her guidance when building the new structures. The wet weather we had following installation has really helped the willow establish itself and the Wigloo is looking impressive!

The Friends have also organised planting two cherry blossom trees in the Centre-grounds, and we hope that they will put on a colourful display for years to come. A special mention must be given to Vivien Fenn-Webber for her generous donation towards a second tree in memory of her beloved horse, Sherry Trifle, who sadly died last summer.

A sub-group of the Friends have continued to work in the allotment, which we have named 'The Backyard'. Experiencing shared enjoyment of community gardening, has been central to hopes of developing this into a community space for local people to enjoy and benefit from. We successfully applied for funding from VODA's Grow & Eat Community Grant and were awarded £460 to help develop this area. It is important to the group that all gardening is done by sustainable practices that protect the environment and wildlife habitats at the Rising Sun Country Park, as well as encourage biodiversity. It is for these reasons we have been applying principles of permaculture; the belief that ecosystems in a garden are self-sufficient and grow in a sustainable way.

Since September 2022, the Friends have been hosting a monthly litter-pick event (on the last Monday of each month). Despite a disappointing turn out for the first few months, we persisted and now have several regular attendees, including students from the Living to Learn Group with whom we have developed good community links. The Great British Spring Clean 2023 was held in March and we were joined by the McCrew Team from McDonald's, ASDA Community Champions, 1st Rising Sun Brownies as well as several family groups and other park users. We again used this event to tackle the path between Davidsons Garage and ASDA, an area of the park that accumulates lots of rubbish from the passing traffic along Whitley Road. Approximately 60 bags of rubbish were collected at this event.

The run up to Christmas was a very busy time, as we were again enrolled as Santa's helpers. Lots of preparation is needed to get the Park ready for Santa's arrival at the Outdoor Education Christmas Grotto; presents to wrap, decorations to make and activities to prepare! Happily, Santa was able to stay to attend the Parks first Christmas Fayre where the Friends Group had a small fundraising stall, selling homemade crafts, bulbs and seeds and of course the Friends of Rising Sun Country Park calendar! Thank you to everyone who came along to say hello and supported us! A great time was had by all.

In December, the flight diverters requested by the Friends Group were finally installed to the power lines adjacent to Swallow Pond. We would like to thank Northern PowerGrid for listening to our concerns and agreeing to complete this work to reduce incidences of bird strike. This improvement will be of great benefit to the resident and visiting waterfowl that migrate through the park.

At the end of 2022, we lost access to our Facebook Group. With social media being our primary means of promoting our activities outside the park we were keen to get up and running again as soon as possible and so created a new Facebook page with an associated group and began using Instagram for the first time. Our new social media platforms are performing well and growing with followers. I would like to thank Joe Dobinson for his help

in creating Flora and Fauna Albums of the Rising Sun Country Park on the Facebook group. These have been an excellent way of showing casing the wide range of biodiversity the park has to offer.

Two guided bird walks with Oscar, the Nature Detective, were held in early Spring. These were free events funded by the Friends Group. Despite poor weather on both dates, the birds and nature did not disappoint, and we had an enjoyable and informative walk. We were given some excellent feedback and are keen to run similar events again in the future.

The City Nature Challenge 2023 ran for four days at the end of April 2023, and once again the Friends were busy making wildlife observations; bird watching, pond dipping, mini beast hunting, recording observations of plants, trees and wildflowers and well as carrying out sunset surveys to record nocturnal animals such as bats and owls. A total of 220 observations of 166 different species were made onsite, a good result for a very cold and wet weekend!

As a group, we would not be able to achieve anything of significance without the continued support and backing of North Tyneside Council. We have worked hard to develop good working relationships with the park team and are pleased to have regular representation from council staff at our monthly meetings, where we are kept informed of plans and developments. It is pleasing to report that we have recently re-established links with representatives from Northumberland Estates, responsible for the managements of the park extension, and are hopeful that similar working relationships can be built. We are also very grateful for the continued support from Ian Hogg, who attends our committee meetings as the representative from McDonalds and has been a great supporter of our litter picks, and to Lisa and Michelle (ASDA's Community Champions) who have continued to provide us with bedding plants and organised a generous donation of Easter eggs so that we could hold a raffle to raise funds, you both are true community champions! On behalf of the group I would also like to thank Michael and the staff at Fire & Earth Bakery for their generous contribution towards calendar production costs once again this year and for their ongoing support.

Of course, the Friends group would not function at all without an effective committee. Each member has an important role to play and do so with energy and enthusiasm. So, thank you all for your hard work and continued support. To Eric Styan, for collating the park events, activities and wildlife observation each month to produce a newsletter on behalf of the group, along side your duties as group treasurer. To Keith Taylor, for agreeing to take over as group secretary following Keith Page's resignation and for keeping me organised! To Janet Weatherburn for helping to Admin the Facebook Group. To Jan Casson, Vivien Fenn-Webber and Janet again for your positive words of encouragement and ongoing support. To our newest member Amanda Williams, welcome to our small and enthusiastic group! I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Keith Page for his commitment to the group during his six years as Group Secretary and to wish him all the best in his future

endeavours. Sadly, we also said goodbye to Dennis Nelson, a valued member of the committee who passed away suddenly in April. Dennis was a longtime supporter of the park and the Friends Group and will be much missed by us all and his many friends in the community.

Looking ahead to the next twelve months and there are lots of exciting events in the diary, namely a Summer Family Festival in August and celebrating 20 years of the Countryside Centre in October! We are looking forward to using the funding awarded to us by VODA's Grow & Eat community grant for the development of 'The Backyard Allotment' and becoming part of a developing Community Garden Network in North Tyneside. The Park will also be benefiting from funding allocated to the council as mitigation for the impact of recent housing development (section 106 monies), with several improvements being planned. Exciting time ahead!

Claire Partleton

Chair

May 2023