



FRIENDS OF RISING SUN COUNTRY PARK

Chairperson's Annual Report – 2024-2025

In 2024 we amended our constitution to include an overall vision to guide the group's activities, this was: *To protect and improve the Rising Sun Country Park as a heritage asset, a place of ecological interest, site of local natural beauty and recreational use, and to promote the conservation of its natural flora and fauna to ensure that all persons can benefit from the amenity.*

As set out by the constitution, Friends of Rising Sun Country Park objects are to:

- *Promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment by promoting the biodiversity & wildlife habitats of Rising Sun Country Park in North Tyneside.*
- *Advance the education of the public and local community in conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment while working in partnership with local business, council and other organisations and members of the public.*

This annual report will provide a summary of the Friend's activities and achievements over the past twelve months in relation to our guiding vision and objects.

Thursday volunteering – volunteer numbers have remained steady over the past year, with a small, core group of regular attendees at each Thursday morning session. During these sessions volunteers have helped the park team with regular maintenance activities in the centre-grounds and wider park site.

As part of these sessions, we have been involved in **bulb planting** in the Quarry, wildlife garden and Hadrian Wood during Autumn 2024. It has been lovely to see the fruits of our labours this Spring when these wildflowers bloomed, providing essential nectar and pollen to insects emerging from hibernation and a touch of colour for park visitors to enjoy.

In October, some volunteers were involved in helping the park team to prepare new **tern islands** that were installed on Swallow Pond; this involved covering rafts with gravel, to mimic gravel islands terns would naturally nest on, and fitting Perspex panels to the outside of these rafts to counter any predation from otters.

In early March 2025, our Thursday sessions were devoted to **tree planting** in Planation Woodland (behind ASDA). Following completion of a program of forestry work by North Tyneside Council's contractor to remove storm damaged and diseased trees, the Friends Group applied to Woodlands Trust and The Conservation Volunteers for 'free trees for community groups' to help with the park team's plans for new habitat creation in this area. Over 500 small saplings were received and planted, (native species including oak, beech, hornbeam, alder, silver birch, rowan, wild cherry, hazel and field maple). Despite a very dry Spring, these trees appear to be doing well, with many 'in leaf'. The Friends will be involved in ongoing maintenance of these young trees over the coming weeks and months. We have received confirmation that our second application for another 400+ trees from Woodlands Trust was successful and these will be received later this year, for November planting.

More recently we have been involved in **Wattle Workshops** with Outdoor Education, where we have been learning heritage craft skills to be used in the creation of a new 'roundhouse' structure for the Celtic Village. We are looking forward to further development of this exciting project.

Litter picking – we have continued to organise community litter picking sessions on the last Monday each month and have also held two Saturday sessions; one in June 2024 for 'The Big Green Week', and then in April 2025 for the annual Great British Spring Clean. Thanks go to the McCrew team from McDonalds, ASDA Benton's wonderful Community Champions Lisa and Michelle, and the enthusiastic young people from 1st Rising Sun Brownies and Guides, and their leaders who helped on this year's event.

Since January 2024, I have been recording all bags of litter collect by The Friends on Keep Britain Tidy's Collect and Count Log. The total number collected in 2024 amounted to 157 bags, with an estimated 220.5 hours spent cleaning (this is the cumulative total of all volunteers that took part). We already look to be exceeding these numbers in 2025.

Thanks go to our regular litter picking team who turn up rain or shine to help keep Rising Sun Country Park looking as tidy and litter free as possible.

Nature Discovery Walks – we have been co-running monthly Nature Walks with the Outdoor Education Wardens since February 2024. The aims being to increase awareness of the park's biodiversity, encourage local community nature recording, as well as providing opportunities for experienced and novice wildlife watchers to come together and share knowledge about wildlife on our doorstep. Despite interest shown via social media, these walks have not been attended as well as we hoped. However, there has been value in providing time to participate in several citizen science recording projects. Going forward, we plan to advertise these sessions more widely to increase community interest. These sessions are free and take place on the third Thursday of each month (10am -12noon) until November 2025.

Citizen Science Projects – involvement in citizen science projects can make a difference to nature, and as a group we have continued to be actively involved in several national and local projects that record nature and wildlife. We have also used our noticeboard and social media platforms to raise local community awareness. Some projects that we have been involved with are:

- **GenePools2024** – our third year of being involved in this project run by Natural England, Natural History Museum, Cefas and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. This year we provided water samples from 4 of the park's ponds. Information about eDNA gained from ponds sampled in this project is used to support initiatives to help urban planners make decisions benefitting wildlife through the Green Infrastructure Framework, which is provided by Natural England.
- **Gosforth's Wild Web** – our involvement in this two-year project run by Natural History Society of Northumbria (NHSN) has raised our profile and improved links with NHSN. We have hosted the Nature Rangers from Gosforth's Wild Web at two of our Nature Discovery Walks, contributed to the NHSN Magazine and been involved in evaluating the Wild Web Project. Gosforth's Wild Web is coming to an end this summer and the Friends have been invited, along with other community groups, local schools and volunteers to a Celebration Event being held at the Hancock Museum.
- **City Nature Challenge 2025** – we have been submitting wildlife observations from RSCP to this annual, four day global bioblitz since 2021. Each year we have made more observations and recorded more species than the one before! Wildlife observations totalling 4681 were made across Northeast England 'city' region this year, with 321 of those observations made by the Friends Group, recording 237 species, which is 49 more than 2024!
- **Other projects include** – RSBP Big Garden Bird Watch, Field Studies Council Signs of Spring Survey, Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count and BCT sunset surveys.

Events – The Friends have supported the Park team with two public events over the past twelve months.

The Summer Festival in August saw a return of The Friend's **Scarecrow Trail** with a Nursery Rhyme theme. Once again, this trail proved to be popular with families. We have been asked to organise another trail for this summer's event that will be Superheroes and Disney themed. Several local groups and businesses have already committed to contributing a scarecrow.

In the run up to Christmas, the Friends were involved in grotto preparation and putting up decorations for school group visits to Santa's Grotto and helped with marshalling on day of the Centre's Christmas Fayre, as well as having a fundraising stall.

We have also created several self-led activity and nature spotter sheets to engage families during school holiday's; for example, a Halloween-themed fungi spotting sheet in October, a festive 'Winter Wonderland' trail at Christmas, Litter Bingo in February, and this Easter we collaborated with Outdoor Education on Signs of Spring with Coco's Carrot Quest; this was a big hit with the younger visitors to the Wildlife Garden.

The Backyard Allotment – We have continued to develop the allotment area, creating new habitat areas in our wildlife plot and we are currently establishing a new raised-bed herb garden. The Backyard Allotment is a member of the North Tyneside Community Garden Network, which has provided group networking opportunities, support and access to training. In the autumn Janet Weatherburn and I attended a day of 'nature rewilding' training provided by Climate Action North, along with other members of the Network.

Fundraising – We have continued to raise funds through various activities, such as offering duck food, plants, bulbs and produce from The Backyard Allotment for a small donation. Monies have also been raised through selling our 2025 Friends of Rising Sun Country Park calendar and photographic greeting cards. Thanks are extended to all the photographers who've allow us to use their images.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Zest Sports Massage for their kind donation of £25 from a raffle held in benefit of the Friends Group at the Summer Fayre, and Michael at Earth & Fire Bakery for his charitable contribution towards production costs of this year's calendar. We are extremely grateful to all park visitors who contribute their small change to our various onsite donation boxes. Every little helps!

Donations help the Friends carryout small projects around the park, for example we were able to fund a replacement dedication plaque for the **Anne Frank Tree** in the Wildlife garden when the original plaque went missing, thus ensuring the heritage of this symbolic tree is preserved for visitors.

Social Media – The Friends group has continued to use various social media platforms to promote events, activities and projects that we are involved in, as well as sharing fun nature facts with regular posts such as #wildflowerwednesday and #fungifriday. With fewer people now engaging with social media, other ways of raising community awareness of our group should be explored.

The development of a Friends Website (<https://e-voice.org.uk/friendsrscp>) continues to be a work-in-progress. Some of the heritage information about the park has been added along with copies of committee minutes of meeting, and information of regular events.

Governance – Last year we began developing various policy documents that are recommended for Friends Groups by the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces (the umbrella organisation that supports Friends Groups across the UK). Progress on this has stalled, but I hope this is something the group can revisit over the year ahead to strengthen group effectiveness and improve our chances of securing funding grants for future projects.

Other acknowledgements – None of the above would have been achieved if it wasn't for the support of:

- Park visitors who put value on what we through donations, granting permission to use photographs, and providing words of encouragement and appreciation.
- Committee members and NTC park team who direct the work of the Friends
- The dedication, commitment and enthusiasm of all our volunteers who put these plans into action.

To conclude and looking to the year ahead – 2024/25 has been a positive year for the Friends group and we have continued to meet constitution objects. The group is already formulating plans for the year ahead to include a new interpretation board and brass rubbing trail for the centre grounds, helping Outdoor Education with re-development of the Celtic Village, along with continuation of our regular programme of activities.

Addendum On behalf of the group I would like to formally thank Keith Taylor for his work as group secretary over the past two years, we appreciate the time and commitment you have shown and have kept the group running smoothly.

Claire Partleton

May 2025