

# Friends of Whirlow Brook Park Newsletter FOWP

## Issue 1



## Welcome from our Chair

Welcome to our first issue of the Friends of Whirlow Brook Park (FOWP) newsletter. We hope you enjoy reading it. We've been very busy since we set up the group in March this year. The steering group (Shelagh, Roger, Chris, Maggie and David) have had a lot of help from other Friends groups and the Sheffield Green Spaces Forum, as a result, we now have a Constitution ready to put to a general meeting in the autumn. At this meeting officers and members of the management committee will be elected. We also hope to set up a number of sub-groups to support the main committee. We have a bank account and a Facebook page, we are exploring charitable status and we are shortly to embark on designing a website. We've researched the fascinating history of the Benton Jones family who owned Whirlow Brook between the wars, and have made contact with their great grandson who lives at Irnham Hall, near Grantham. He and the Lord Mayor will untie the ribbon on the new shelter in the SU3A garden on 23 June, when we will launch the Friends Group.

We held a Covid-friendly consultation meeting in May; and after discussion with the Parks Manager, Andy Mumford, we have a number of tasks to keep us busy this year whilst we work on a future plan. Whirlow Brook isn't going to be a quick fix - there are drainage issues; both of the ponds leak; trees and shrubs have grown too big and are damaging walls; ivy and pernicious weeds are everywhere; the millpond is badly silted and the Limb valley is full of the dreaded Himalayan balsam. Much of the restoration work will cost serious money and we will need to work at raising the funds. But we are far from daunted - we already have nearly 20 regular hands-on volunteers and others have promised to join in on special occasions such as the annual pond clearance. Some members are offering help with organising events or designing play and learning activities for young children. We aim to tap into as much expertise as possible over the coming months. Have a look at the schedule of dates and tasks and if you can

help on any of them, the Membership Secretary would be delighted to hear from you! Have a lovely summer and we will be back in touch during August with details of the General Meeting, to which everyone is warmly invited.

*Shelagh Woolliscroft*  
Chair FOWP Steering Group

## Consultation Event 19<sup>th</sup> May

FOWP held its first public consultation event on 19 May. The sun shone on us and we had around 85 visitors (in groups of 30) throughout the evening. Councillors Colin Ross, Martin Smith and Joe Otten welcomed visitors and listened to people's concerns. There were 69 completed questionnaires with a variety of



### Councillors Colin Ross and Martin Smith

views and ideas ranging from restoring the rose gardens to more innovative ideas for wild flower gardens, a nature trail and beehives! People overwhelmingly didn't want to see the atmosphere of the park changed too much, appreciating its tranquil nature and sense of well-being (57). 29 people appreciated the ease of parking. The full report of the consultation event is attached at Appendix 1. Thanks to all who came on the day and responded. We currently have over 100 members signed up as 'friends'.

## What we've done so far

We have held two very successful volunteer sessions on 26 May when we had Ranger Graeme to lead us and another on 5 June. Our first project is to weed and dig the sunken garden. We are currently clearing a lot of undergrowth and tidying up the flower beds. We hope to turn this into a scented garden with plants such as lavender, rosemary etc - because of the dip in the garden, the scent should linger more.



## Subscriptions

The current subscription to join FOWP is £10 a year per household. All subscriptions will go towards the upkeep of the park. We have a 100 people on our mailing list and around half have signed up by standing order which is our preferred method of payment. So if you haven't paid your subscription yet please do this through online banking by setting up an immediate payment for £10 now, and then a regular annual payment at the same time each year. If you don't have online banking you can complete the Standing Order form to send to your bank. (See attachments to the email) If you have any queries please email us at [friendsofwhirlowbrookpark@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwhirlowbrookpark@gmail.com)

## Who we are

The current Steering Group members are:

Chair - Shelagh Woolliscroft,

Secretary - Roger Lasko

Treasurer - Chris Cave

Membership Secretary - David Jordan

## Himalayan Balsam



Introduced to the UK in 1839, Himalayan balsam is now a naturalised plant, found especially on riverbanks and in waste places where it has become a problem weed. Conservation authorities regularly organise 'balsam bashing' work parties to clear the weed from marshland

and riverbanks. It is common across the northern hemisphere where it spreads very effectively by exploding seed pods that contain up to 800 seeds. Much of the Limb Valley is affected. The only effective method of controlling it is by uprooting it before it flowers. So this is what we intend to do on **Saturday 3 July**. With the help of our resident expert Dr John Wilson we have identified a few large areas in the Limb Brook that are easily accessible and we want volunteers to help! Please email us at [friendsofwhirlowbrookpark@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwhirlowbrookpark@gmail.com) if you would like to help.

## History of Whirlow Brook Hall

Whirlow Brook Hall was built by Percy Fawcett in 1906 and during the 1920s and 1930s was the home of his sister Madge and her husband Walter Benton Jones, who became the 2nd Baronet of Treeton in 1936. Madge (who had grown up at Whirlow Court) and Walter, designed the gardens with the help of the RHS. The rockery was constructed and planted by Backhouse of York. Many unusual trees were planted. Six gardeners were employed to maintain the estate.

After Lady Madge's death in 1938, Sir Walter relocated to the family seat at Irnham Hall, Grantham. The estate, which was dearly loved by his wife, was acquired by Sheffield Corporation in 1946 through the generosity of the JG Graves Charitable Trust and the Sheffield Town Trust with a view to making it a public park. Various works needed to be carried out including the construction of roadways, paths, parking spaces and drains. The house was adapted for use as a cafe.

The park was officially opened on 15 June 1951 by the Lord Mayor of Sheffield, Alderman T W Bridgland. During the decades which followed up to eight gardeners were employed, two of whom lived in the house. Due to its history and the quality of its planting the park was included in the local register of historic parks and gardens.

Cuts to Council budgets started to have an effect on the park in the 1990s. Fretwell Downing took out an operating lease on the Hall which was used for offices and functions in addition to providing the cafe. Saxon (Vine) Hotels acquired the lease in 2013 on the condition that the Hall be used as a wedding venue. Plans to provide a cafe in another part of the park are currently in progress.

In 2010, the Council gave permission for Su3a to restore the rock garden area and work started in 2011. The rest of the park continued to deteriorate due to lack of resources. With the launch of a Friends Group, it is hoped that the next decade will see Whirlow Brook Park restored to its former glory.

## Our next volunteer days

All volunteer sessions will start at 9.45am, meeting at the grass square just below the top car park. There will be a register and a health and safety talk for any new volunteers. We will also ask you to give us an emergency contact number for a partner, friend or neighbour. Please wear sturdy shoes and bring gloves. There are a variety of gardening tools to use but you are welcome to bring your own. Bring a drink and hand sanitizer!

**Saturday 3 July - removing Himalayan balsam from the Limb Brook.**

**Wednesday 21 July - clearance of sunken garden. Weed flower beds on lawn**

**Saturday 7 August - Sand and repaint some benches\***

**Monday 16 August - clear heather beds by drive. Cut back laurels on drive near the entrance. Weed flower beds on lawn.**

**Saturday 4 Sept - TBA depending on progress to date**

**Wednesday 22 Sept - Plant bulbs, weed flower beds on lawn**

**Saturday 2 October - clear lower pond margins**

**Monday 18 October - clear lower pond margins**

**Saturday 6 November - Plant heathers on drive side**

**Wednesday 17 November - plant sunken garden**

**\*to be postponed to 2022 if schedule slips.**

# Appendix 1

## Analysis of Questionnaires from FOWP Consultation Session, 19 May 2021

69 questionnaires completed.

### How often do you visit the park?

- 8 - Daily or many times a week
- 17 - weekly
- 19 - once a month
- 24 - occasionally

### Why do you visit?

- 18 - As part of a longer walk
- 12 - To admire the scenery and the planting
- 11 - Nostalgia
- 9 - To walk the dog
- 8 - Bring children/grandchildren
- 6 - Meet families/picnic

### What features do you most appreciate?

- 57 - Tranquil nature/sense of well-being
- 52 - Access to Limb Valley and Ringinglow
- 46 - Rock garden and woodland paths
- 45 - The trees
- 35 - The ponds
- 29 - Ease of parking
- 17 - Sense of history
- 5 - Views
- 2 - The adult feel
- 1 - Screened carparks
- 1 - Birdlife
- 1 - Den-building

### What features would you like to see restored/improved?

- 35 - The lower pond by the main drive
- 33 - The trees and shrubs
- 30 - The rose gardens
- 30 - Wildlife
- 27 - The Limb Brook
- 23 - Availability of litter bins (4 specified dog poo bins)
- 21 - The young children's play area
- 21 - The footpaths (muddy)
- 5 - The waterways in the rock garden
- 2 - Signage
- 2 - Seating on the terrace
- 1 - The unsafe steps in the sunken garden
- 1 - Repaint benches
- 1 - The vista over the millpond
- 1 - Boating lake launch site replaced with floating pontoon
- 1 - Disabled parking
- 1 - More flowering shrubs at the entrance
- 1 - Liaison with Parks Department
- 1 - Plant collections

### What new features would you like to see?

- 43 Wildflower areas
- 32 - New herbaceous beds
- 28 - Beehives
- 27 - Sculptures
- 15 A space for growing food
- 5 - Information boards
- 3 - Nature trail
- 3 - Kids' fitness trail
- 1 - Herb garden
- 1 - fruit bushes/trees
- 1 - Eco garden
- 1 - Bug house
- 1 - More formal beds in front of the house for wedding guests to enjoy
- 1 - Plant labels
- 1 - More unusual trees and shrubs
- 1 - A Forest school
- 1 - Pollution monitoring
- 1 - Flood control on the Limb Brook which is sensitive to the wildlife
- 1 - Something unique - temporary art installations?

### What sort of events would you like?

- 50 - Talks/demonstrations on gardening/ecology/floristry (Ecology most popular)
- 39 - Plant sales
- 34 - Nature walks
- 27 Musical events
- 21 - Tai Chi or similar
- 4 - Outdoor theatre
- 1 - Dance
- 1 - Christmas event
- 1 - Treasure hunt
- 1 - Fairy trail
- 1 - Walking trails
- 1 - Garden gym
- 1 - Access for the BAME community

### What would you NOT like to see happening to this park?

- 11 - Playground for older children
- 10 - Over commercialisation - fast food, fun fair,
- 8 - Noisy events
- 4 - Park run
- 3 - Overcrowding/overuse
- 3 - Anti-Social behaviour
- 3 - Memorials, wreaths on benches
- 2 - More buildings
- 2 - Sculptures
- 2 - Cycling
- 1 - Ball games
- 1 - Dogs off the lead
- 1 - Drug trafficking
- 1 - A cafe on the drive
- 1 - Anything detrimental to wild life