

Friends of Whirlow Brook Park – Minutes of Annual General Meeting 2025

Meeting held on Monday 9 June 2025 at Whirlow Brook Hall

The meeting was attended by 30 members (listed at the back of these minutes) and chaired by Colin Ross.

Note: immediately before the AGM, there was a talk by Laura Alston, Partnerships and Visitor Experience Manager for Sheffield City Council Parks and Countryside Service. A copy of her handout is attached, together with a note of the Q&A session.

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from 2 members (as listed at the end of these minutes)

2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 3 June 2024

Proposed by the Chair, accepted nem con

The minutes mentioned the possibility of a bid for Lottery funding for water management. As a matter arising from the minutes, the question was asked whether a bid had been made? The answer was no, but more would be said in the next item.

3 Trustees' Report for the year ended 31 March 2025 – to receive

Shelagh Woolliscroft presented the report, supported by a series of slides illustrating many of our achievements over the course of the year. She started with membership numbers. There was a very small increase in numbers over the year but it would be reassuring to see the number go up substantially – please would all of us encourage others to join.

One of the themes of her talk was the good spirit in which in which we do our work and the jolly mood of the corporate volunteers and young people who help us. In that context, she gave particular thanks to Denise West who had been a joy to work with but was having to stand down from the Management Committee for health reasons.

Thanks also went to the Holdsworth family for the generous bequest from the estate of Derek and Vanessa; to Gripple, our new corporate sponsor who are donating £1000 a year plus volunteering from their staff; and to Andy Mumford, Parks Manager for Whirlow Brook, for his guidance and support. A small part of the Holdsworth bequest has been spent on a yellow magnolia in the Commemorative Garden, where Derek volunteered for many years.

Shelagh presented the main results of the Park User Survey done in August/September 2024, very largely supportive of developments in the Park. 'Dislikes' were few and far between, which is pleasing.

Another theme of Shelagh's talk was the continuing problems with water: she compared rainfall at Weston Park for period 1955-2023 showing average annual rainfall of 839.9mm with our own records of rainfall for 2023 and 2024 of 1406.5mm and 1361.6mm. Incidents of flash flooding have increased markedly as a result. Measures such as the 'pier' across the drive above the café, built thanks to Andy Mumford, help protect the Hall and Café from flooding but do nothing for trees and planting in the Park. It has taken longer than we hoped to decide measures to help the Park as a whole. But it now looks very likely that attenuation ponds will be created in Rough Standhills. Getting that done, plus associated landscaping, will require funding, so we expect to be making a Lottery bid later this year.

The past year saw the Family Trail completed and formally opened last July; and a community orchard created in what was derelict land near the Park entrance. We were greatly helped in clearing the site by volunteers from Gripple, Cadent and Henry Boot. Part of the dismal Cupressus hedge at one side of the site was removed and replaced with a native hedge, much of it planted by Greenhill Scouts. University Conservation Volunteers built a stumpery and helped plant the 20 fruit trees, the cost of which was met by donations from members of FoWP. And Gripple installed a boundary fence to protect the young trees from damage by deer. The orchard has been a major project which will require continuing work through 2025/26 and doubtless beyond.

There was a healthy programme of events over the year including the popular Easter Egg Hunt, Plant Swap/Sale, summer concerts, guided walks, Christmas Carols with a Salvation Army band, and much more beside.

All this was done in addition to the work of our volunteers in routine maintenance work, and looking after the beds and borders, as in the annual maintenance plan devised by the Area Manager. They have been a joy to work with.

We were honoured to have been nominated for the King's Award for Voluntary Service. We await the result in the Autumn, knowing that competition is very fierce.

Colin Ross declared himself super-impressed by the work done so far and the desire to keep on doing more.

4 Treasurer's Report for the year ended 31 March 2025 - to receive

Chris Cave presented the Treasurer's Report, noting that the most striking feature of the accounts has been the increase in our bank balance from £20,000 to £34,000, entirely due to the Holdsworth bequest. It will be very helpful to have this money as match-funding, as and when we make a bid to the Lottery Heritage Fund.

Donations or grants given for specific purposes were all spent over the course of the year.

Our financial position is healthy but fund-raising must continue. One straightforward way of increasing our income would be for as many as possible members who have not yet signed Gift Aid forms to do so.

Chris ended by thanking Chris Jones, our external examiner, in his absence for his constructive recommendations and for completing his work so swiftly.

5 Appointment of External Examiner - to be approved

The Chair proposed that Chris Jones be reappointed as External Examiner – agreed to general acclaim

6 Election of Trustees

Shelagh Woolliscroft, as Chair of Trustees, proposed by Peter Bower, seconded by Barry Wiles – elected nem con

Chris Cave, as Treasurer, proposed by Alison Cowper, seconded by Peter Bower – elected nem con

Roger Lasko, as Secretary of Trustees, proposed by Nick Goffin, seconded by Barry Wiles – elected nem con

7 Election of other members of the Management Committee

Barry Wiles, proposed by, Nick Goffin, seconded by Margaret Darling

David Jordan, proposed by Alison Cowper, seconded by Barry Wiles

Maggie Girling, proposed by Nicola Hunter, seconded by Barry Wiles

Nick Goffin, proposed by Chris Whittaker, seconded by Stephen Hughes

The chair invited a vote for the four, as a group – elected nem con

8 Close of AGM

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Attendance at the AGM

Janet Barnsley	Elizabeth Birks	Peter Bower
Chris Cave	Alison Cowper	Kathleen Cox
Chris Fildes	Nicola Gilbert	Judy & David Gill
Maggie Girling	Nick Goffin	Jane & James Hall
Stephen Hargreaves	Anne Johnson	David Jordan
Roger Lasko	Kate Pinder	Colin Ross
Bridget Tattersall	Sue & John Turner	Denise West
Christine Whittaker &	Barry & Kath Wiles	Shelagh Woolliscroft
Stephen Hughes	Christopher Yaw	

Apologies were received from

Andrew & Caroline Renwick,
Sheila Harris
Elaine Ferguson

Partnerships and Visitor Experience Manager

Overview

I am Laura Alston, the new Partnerships and Visitor Experience Manager for Sheffield City Council Parks and Countryside Service. Part of this new role has taken over from Karen Lewis's previous role.

Email: laura.alston@sheffield.gov.uk

Tel: 07825079196

A bit about me:

My background is in Community Heritage, and I have a doctorate in History from the University of Sheffield. I have worked for the past 10 years on a large variety of projects and with communities and groups across Sheffield and the wider region, most of which have brought together heritage, green spaces, education, interpretation, engagement, culture, and nature/biodiversity. In the past 4 years I have worked for the Council on National Heritage Lottery funded projects, as Activity and Engagement Officer at Sheffield General Cemetery and as Education and Engagement Coordinator at Sheffield Botanical Gardens.

Partnerships Strategy

There were some key discussion outcomes in the Sheffield Green Spaces Forum for Friends of Groups and Environmental Volunteers and Groups partnerships with SCC and things that groups wanted to see, these were:

- Link to Rangers, link to managers of local areas.
- Provide more Rangers to monitor and take care of woodlands etc which assets.
- All Departments on same page e.g Glyphosate parks no, housing yes.
- Consultation.
- More money – empower citizens to improve green spaces.
- Continuity of staff communications.
- Clarity on key contacts and their roles and responsibilities.
- Transparency on process for projects, strategy development, funding bids.
- Commitment to agreed partnership process and culture.
- Partnership with councillors and LACS.
- Fewer silos – recognition across departments.

- Enabling the groups to do the work – more permissions.
- Timescales for management.
- Ecological input: use of <https://www.inaturalist.org/> to support ecology on the ground.
- Plans and management plans brought up to date – quicker and simpler.
- CHAMPIONS.

This role will be able to, in the short and long term, support many of these objects and be a point of contact to:

- To support the Friends of Groups and Environmental Groups in Council Green Spaces across the City, including any queries about insurance, documentation, permissions for activities, risk assessments, constitutions, promotion for new members etc.
- To help to put you in touch with relevant Council Officers and to bring more clarity on Officers roles, such as the Area Managers, Project Officers, Playgrounds Team to support with your activities and proposals. I will also be working with different Council Departments and with SCC Officers you are likely already working with such as Community Forestry, Allotments, Ecology, the Rangers, and others.
- To do the same for Council Officers to help with consultation.
- I will always be open and transparent about what is possible and what isn't or may take some time. I will help with the transparency of the Council systems, help take you through processes and keep you updated on where things are in development.
- To help Friends Groups and Environmental Groups match up with other partnerships outside the Council as well. I am happy to help with advice where I can on funding bids, projects, interpretation, education, accessibility, inclusivity and other endeavours as well.
- To take part in the Sheffield Green Spaces Forum.
- I will make it a priority to supporting groups social and green action in all parts of the city and will prioritise groups which need support in getting heard, broadening membership and getting started. I have been getting updated with where groups currently are and I will be looking at setting up new targets for groups and volunteering.
- I am also planning to support communications on SCC Parks social media accounts for Friends of Groups as well. If you have information, events or activities you want to share then I may be able to help subject to my capacity/volume of info sent in and priority of the information (e.g. events happening imminently will go out first). I am planning on doing a regular slot for Friends of Groups comms on social media, so do send in anything you

want included on that. I want to help make sure that as many people as possible can find opportunities to take part in the work that Friends of Groups do.

The Partnerships and Visitor Experience Manager role will also be part of the wider Green and Open Spaces Strategy for the city and a support for helping to continue and develop the vital work of groups volunteering in the environment. As such in accordance with the Strategy some of my key overall aims are:

- To make sure all groups feel supported and to help to address the balance of voices for groups across the city.
- Explore pathways and funding for training for groups across the city for the different training needs highlighted in the 2024 December SGSF Forum.
- To be another point of liaison between the work going on, on the ground and the senior leadership team at the Council.
- To work across departments with Highways and Housing among others to look at addressing consistency of procedures in volunteering and to have more dialogue about differences in approach to practices.
- To support Council volunteering initiatives and procedures to make it as easy as possible for volunteering through the Council for as many people as possible.
- To help to develop and champion the partnerships between SCC and groups, and to grow the autonomy of groups in the ability to gain permissions, to do work on sites and to work closely with the Area Managers in this endeavour.
- To support the above by working on approaches to enable groups to input into management plans for green spaces and to develop this into consistent and best practice across the city with Area Managers.
- To support area dialogue- to be a point of connection for groups across the city to other groups, local organisations, community groups and to join them to wider networks, to break down silos of work.
- To help to connect to the wider partnerships which enhance this work, including the Wildlife Trust on Nature Recovery, Peak District National Park, the Universities, community organisations and national organisations such as the Environment Agency, English Heritage, the National Trust, Historic England and the National Lottery.
- To provide my facilitation and support to all initiatives which seek to improve visitor experiences of green spaces, gain Green Flag status, improve engagement and learning on sites, gain heritage or wildlife protections or status, for funding for projects and long-term improvements.
- To support the marketing approach of SCC of green spaces, to promote and celebrate the work that happens but also to advance the reputation of the city nationally.

Information for Groups

As a reminder you can get lots of supportive documents from these pages of the Council website too:

['Friends Of' groups | Sheffield City Council](#)

[Organise a community litter pick | Sheffield City Council](#)

I am trying to keep up to date with information about Friends of Groups in the City. If information about your group has changed or you need to let me know the best email or phone number to get in contact etc., please let me know. Please also feel free to share this information and my contact details with other members of your group or society.

Requirements

All Friends of Groups working in green spaces need to have the following:

- A constitution and committee
- A bank account
- PLI Insurance
- Permissions from the Area Manager
- Risk Assessments for activities

Insurance Scheme with SGSF

Sheffield City Council works with Sheffield Green Spaces Forum to provide PLI insurance for groups with insurers Griffiths and Armour. **We currently support the maximum amount of groups we can on this scheme. Please let me know if your group wants to be considered to join this scheme and I will let you know if a space becomes available.** We will be reviewing how many spaces are available this year and hope to be able to offer more in the future as well. The scheme has some requirements:

Important Information:

- It is a requirement of the PLI that groups attend a minimum of 4 out of the 6 annual SGSF meetings held in the University of Sheffield Arts Tower, alternate months normally starting in January, 7 – 8.30pm. On a Wednesday evening, usually around mid-month. This requirement is in place as SGSF is the named client for the insurance supporting all the groups on the scheme. The attendance records are used to prove in case of a claim that you are an active member directly under the support of SGSF to the insurers. This is a requirement which I will review this year with the insurers to explore any

flexibility but is a current condition for the insurance. **Please also be aware that attendance of the SGSF alone does not mean you are covered by the SGSF insurance**, if you are not in one of the 28 spaces on the scheme then you need to make sure your group has their own PLI insurance. Please contact the Partnerships Manager if you have any questions about this.

- If you are incorporated into the scheme, then you will be sent a proposal form to fill out and send back to the Partnerships Manager which will go to the insurers to determine the rate you will be on. **Sheffield City Council pay the basic premium (approx. £75pa)**. However, some individual groups may need additional cover through the insurer, for example, for power tools, polytunnels etc, this will be on a premium rate. The Council pays the whole amount but the difference between the standard rate and the premium rate will need to be paid to the SGSF Treasurer, who then reimburses the Council.

Finally...

I am so looking forward to working with you all in the months and years to come and to support the vital work that you do to look after our environment, more important now than ever.

Q & A session

Questions asked included

- Are there any groups who get younger volunteers?
Many groups get student volunteer volunteers (incl Duke of Edinburgh and scouts). Hardest group is the 30-50 year olds. The main source of volunteers is older/retired people.
- Is there a Council strategy for joining up policies on Culture & Heritage with Green Spaces?
Yes
- Do Council employees ever volunteer?
Yes – some Departments give volunteering time
- Can there be training on skills, such as how to use chainsaws safely, for specialist volunteers who could work with different charities/friends groups across the city?
Happy to consider specialist training but there are daunting insurance problems with chainsaw use by volunteers.