

Friends of Parkwood Springs Annual General Meeting 2024

7pm on 14th May 2024 - Held at St.Catherine's School, Firshill Crescent.

Present:

Louise Bull (Chair) Peter Bull (Treasurer)

Committee Members:

Seth Kirby (media and Park Run), Penny Philcox, Catherine Gaze, Bernadette O'Callaghan, Robert Almond, Jessica Maynard, Neill Schofield, Carol Schofield

Cllr. Mike Chaplin

Jon Dallow Sheffield City Council

Members: 22 members of the public also present.

Apologies:

Yvonne McMenemy (KINCA), Christine Welburn (Hillsborough Walled Garden Group), Cllr. Christine Gilligan Kubo

1. Chair's Welcome and Introduction – Louise Bull

Agenda:

Updates: Levelling Up Fund Application and Process - Introduced by Peter Bull
 Places to Ride Progress Report – Jon Dallow
 Closed Landfill Site and Wetland – Robert Almond

AGM: Chair's report - Louise Bull
 Treasurer's report - Peter Bull
 Proposed Changes to the Constitution – Neill Schofield
 Election of Committee

AOB.

2. Levelling Up Fund Application and Process - Introduced by Peter Bull

The City Council submitted a bid to Round 2 of the Government's Levelling Up Funding Scheme to renovate the Ski Village site. The bid was unsuccessful at Round 2, but was selected from the Round 2 bids for Round 3. The Council has been in discussions with the Government and £19.4m has been allocated to 'Parkwood' for the Council to deliver the objectives outlined in the original bid with the aim of making Parkwood Springs 'an attractive Country Park animated by sport and leisure for all ages and abilities.'

Its Primary focus is on regeneration.

In order to progress the project the 'Parkwood Area Board' has been set up with representation from local stakeholders.

The Parkwood Area Board is made up of:

Chair: MP Gill Furness

Deputy Chair: Ben Miskell (Sheffield City Council)

Sean McClean (Director Regeneration and Development SCC)

Kate Martin (Executive Director City Futures)

Stakeholders: Friends of Parkwood Springs, Friends of Wardsend Cemetery, KINCA (Kelham Island and Neepsend Community Association) Yorkshire Artspace, National Trust, Valencia (Waste Disposal Company), SOAR (Southey and Owlerton Area Regeneration), Central Local Area Committee (Central LAC), North-East Local Area Committee (NE LAC)

The Board will also call on various SCC employees including Alan Seasman (Interim Head of Regeneration) and Jon Dallow (Parks and Countryside)

The Primary Objectives of the group are to;

Advocate and promote 'Parkwood' – i.e. the whole of Parkwood Springs -

Develop a shared vision

Attract investment and funding for regeneration

Encourage improvements and appropriate development

Encourage more connected access and pedestrian access

Retain the natural beauty and allow regeneration

Regenerate the built environment for the reuse of land

Improve public spaces

Some low-level funding from the City Council will allow the project to start pending Government funding coming on track at the end of the month. Necessary surveys have already started. The Board will be looking to secure further funding for additional improvements in due course.

The first meeting of the Board was held on 13th May 2024 at the Town Hall. The model to be used for the project will be that used at Attercliffe and Castlegate, but it is expected that delays such as those seen in earlier projects will be minimised because the terms of reference are already established.

Skyline, a company which has developed a Luge (downhill go cart runs) in other countries, has shown further interest in Parkwood Springs after the concept of a Gravity Park had been agreed in 2021. Representatives from the New Zealand company are due to visit Sheffield next week to discuss possibilities with the City Council. They may include additional downhill mountain biking trails and a zip wire in their plans, but until they submit a planning application to the City Council no one knows what their definite plans would be.

A Transport Assessment was commissioned some time ago by the City Council to establish the best points of access to the old ski village site. It has only just been submitted, but the Friends Group will be able to see it and comment on its findings. The Group has been consulted during the process.

Discussion:

All the reports will be minuted and publicly available. A planning application will give everyone the right to read it and make representation to the Planning Committee when a decision is being made about Planning consent to any contractor or lessee of the land. The Friends Group endeavour to 'watch it like hawks'!

Concerns were expressed that the area for Skyline to develop might be over-extended or fenced off to improve the viability of a business venture. Also that the business model doesn't meet the needs of local families over pricing etc.

Jon informed the meeting that the Local Area Committees would be taking on the role of consultation for people to discuss issues. The Friends Group agreed to look closely at any plans submitted through the planning process, but encouraged other people to do the same.

The original time limit for completion of the project was 2026, but it may be possible for this to be extended as timescales for some other projects have proved to be undeliverable.

In other projects delays have incurred additional costs, reducing the spending power of the grant funding. All participants hope to get the project moving quickly to avoid this happening.

The original bid was to clear the ski village site and provide better road access. The £19.4m will mostly be spent on doing that. Regeneration is the key objective, but it is hoped that there will be some funds for the remainder of the whole site. This could include funding for Wardsend Cemetery and other regeneration projects. The Board will also look for other funding sources to supplement the LUF funded work.

3. Places to Ride Project - Jon Dallow

This is an Active Country Park Project mostly funded by Sport England.

Since Covid there has been a 25% increase in capital costs, which has unfortunately reduced the scope of work planned.

Despite this since December 2023 there have been new bike trails installed along the Skyline route – connecting the north and south areas of the site and down into Wardsend. This has greatly improved connectivity across the site.

In the 19 years that Jon has been working at Parkwood Springs things have come a very long way! But with the work through this project:

- there has been an increase in the number of mountain bikers using the trails.
- the new Learn to Ride area has been installed for young children, which is already well used.
- the slalom track has been restored (at the top of the Urban Nature Park) with many volunteers helping in the pouring rain to spread the new surface material.
- mountain bike riding sessions have been held
- a film has been made about the installation of the new tracks

- the Toilets and Cafe Kiosk are to be installed on Monday 20th May 2024
- during half term (25th May - 2nd June) there will be children's holiday activities
- there will be a Grand Opening event for the new facilities on Tuesday 18th June.

As part of the Levelling Up project other aspirations will be addressed such as an adventure playground and new containers to enhance the car park area.

A full-time post for two dedicated rangers as a job share is in place. The rangers will be involved working with groups, putting up new signage, installing more benches, storing some bikes on site and addressing fly-tipping etc.

More people using the area positively will improve it for everyone. Schools have been engaged to encourage children to participate in caring for the site. There has been tree and hedge planting to improve biodiversity and a survey of the whole of Parkwood Springs will be undertaken. Much improvement will be seen over the next two years.

Discussion: Members who have used the area for many years said they very much appreciate the improvements – 'It's getting better and better'.

The key for the toilets will be held by groups for their activities and at the cafe kiosk. The toilets will be cleaned regularly.

The Kiosk contract is not yet finalised but the managers are expected to open at weekends and regular days during the week. Prices will need to be profitable but not excessive. The Kiosk managers will open and close the car park.

There will be a diary of events and the cafe will be able to offer an after-hours service to cover events such as the Park Run, football, events involving 30 – 40 people, sports days, cycling days etc.

Concerns were expressed that activities should be aimed for local people and not just for middle class people who could afford mountain bikes etc. For this reason Jon is working closely with SOAR to encourage local people to use the area more and the school work is also helping. All the activities are benefiting local people. Some - but not all events - may be funded.

There were comments that mountain biking was becoming more popular and reducing the incidence of illegal motorbikes.

Jon concluded that it has taken 19 years to reach this point – 'but it's an on-going journey'.

4. The Landfill Site and Attenuation Pond - Robert Almond

Planning consent had been given to the Landfill Company to provide a wildlife, wetland area to contain surface water draining over the closed and sealed landfill site, and they have been granted a license to release water into the sewerage system. However, Viridor installed a rectangular holding tank with an outflow pipe - and not a wetland area. The Friends of Parkwood Springs have been arguing to soften the edges of the tank to create a more attractive wildlife pond. The pond will release water into the system in a controlled run off, but the outlet is above the base level of the pond so some water should remain except in very dry periods. The new company to take over the Landfill Site, Valencia, have suggested softening the sides of the tank with planting, but it isn't enough – it needs more work to shelve the edges to avoid danger to the public and encourage wildlife. The

planting should then prevent too much disturbance of the wetland by dogs to protect nesting water birds and pond life.

There was a question whether the floor could be raised, but this was not an option because the pond was required to hold a specific volume of water and there is little space to extend it. However, it was felt possible to extend part of the space and to shelve it to allow a greater area for wildlife and a wetland.

Robert suggested that the issue needs to be raised at the Area Planning Board to ensure that the original plans which were granted planning consent are carried out in full.

Annual General Meeting

5. Chair's Report – Louise Bull

Monthly Conservation sessions with the rangers - Volunteers have been working over various areas of Parkwood Springs to increase biodiversity on the site – conserving the heather moorland by taking out invasive birch seedlings – working to clear the Frog-Life pond - working on Little Pear Tree Field etc.

There have been monthly Forest garden sessions to maintain the garden which grows fruit for people to pick and use.

New standard trees have been planted on the Urban Nature Reserve (the hillside above the helipad field) alongside the main track from the car park to add interest and provide a shady route across the field. One tree – a Sessile Oak – was bought by the Friends of Parkwood Springs to add to the standard trees and complement the English (Pedunculate) Oak which was installed as our World War 1 memorial.

We have worked with other groups:

John Robinson from the RSPB led the annual Dawn Chorus walk on May 5th observing 25 species of birds including recently arrived migratory birds - whitethroats, chiffchaffs and blackcaps.

Sorby Natural History Society had to postpone their annual small mammal survey last year due to heavy rain, but will do it again this summer.

A fungi walk found interesting and some rare fungi. We have also found some spectacular Scarlet Elf Cups.

Peter Bull led a Heritage Open Day history walk. Penny Philcox led wild flower and tree walks. She has also researched much information about the trees on Parkwood Springs. She has created a 'Tree of the Month' calendar with posters on site and information on the website. These are leading to a future book and tree trail. All the walks have been well attended.

The Friends group continues litter picking to keep the area clear of litter. We have been supported by the Nether Green Litter Pickers and the Trefoil Guild who have been several times and enjoy their days at Parkwood Springs. We have extended their stays by offering history talks during their break as they are visitors to the area, but now very interested.

We have taken an information stall to festivals such as the Abbeyfield Festival, Hillsborough Walled Garden Open Day and the Sheffield Heritage Fair to broaden our outreach to a wider audience.

Seth Kirby has been instrumental in beginning the process for setting up a Park Run. Funds are currently being raised to pay the national organisation to become an official Park Run. A potential route was tried out and more than 30 people came to walk or run over it. To be accepted we need to display a defibrillator in case of emergencies. One has been provided by the British Heart Foundation, but we are concerned by the stipulation that it should be left unlocked.

The October Lantern Procession is a major event of the year. This year we were grant funded again by the Burngreave Ward Pot, but also received funding from the J.G. Graves Trust to widen participation to groups who would not normally have joined us. While group members made lanterns with Watercliffe Meadow Primary school and held sessions on the Helipad field, Patrick Amber and Jo Veal ran workshops involving people from many communities who were speaking 10 different languages. They created the frog which formed the centre piece at the viewpoint. Around 1,000 people attended the final event along with the Sheffield Samba Band and the Youth Samba Band. It was supported by a team of dedicated volunteers including a group of architecture students. The Lord Mayor also joined the procession.

We have been clearing areas for young children to play and it's good to see young families enjoying the new Learn to Ride track.

We have been involved in consultation with the Places to Ride and Levelling Up projects attending meetings and having representation on the Levelling Up Funding Board. Members have engaged with Viridor and Valencia over the landfill restoration and the attenuation pond issues. We have regular contact with Jon Dallow, the rangers and local councillors.

Neill Schofield, who chaired the group for 14 years has now stepped back, but kindly remained on the committee. He was thanked for his work over the years from setting up the Friends Group in 2010.

6. Treasurer's report – Peter Bull

The accounts are available if anyone would like to see them.

Highlights:

This year the lantern festival was the largest expenditure costing £4,000 - £2,000 from the Ward Pot and £2,000 from the J.G. Graves Trust.

For the 2024 lantern procession funding has been applied for to the Sheffield Town Trust. £6,000 spent during the year leaving approximately £7,000 in the bank. This includes money raised to pay for the Park Run, Arches Housing have donated £500 towards this, £800 has been raised locally and negotiations are in progress for sponsorship from local businesses. It is expensive to set up and there is more money to be raised before it will be given the go ahead.

The defibrillator donated by the British heart Foundation could be problematic, but we need to have one before we can start a Park Run, so we may need to buy one at some

point. We are obliged to provide training in the use of a defibrillator therefore leaflets and information will be available for on-line training.

7. The Constitution - Neill Schofield

We set up the Group and agreed the constitution in 2010, but since then a number of things have changed. We therefore need to make a few adjustments to the constitution to bring it up to date. Both the old and the new constitution were available with changes clearly marked.

The changes to the constitution were approved.

8. Election of the Committee

The following had been proposed and seconded in advance of the meeting:

Louise Bull (Chair)

Peter Bull (Treasurer)

Committee Members:

Seth Kirby

Penny Philcox

Catherine Gaze

Bernadette O'Callaghan

Robert Almond

Jessica Maynard

Neill Schofield

Carol Schofield

All were duly elected unanimously.

9. Any Other Business

Future events to look out for during the year:

28th July - Abbeyfield Festival

4th August – 8am Small mammal survey with Sorby Natural History Society

Sheffield Heritage week

7th September - Sitting down by the kiosk talk – 'Parkwood Springs the Deer Park.'

12th September - History walk

In addition to the ongoing monthly sessions for conservation and forest gardening.