



Friends of Castle Parks – Chair’s Report 2022 AGM 2pm, Thursday 2 March 2023

2022 has been quite a year for the Friends. Castle Vale, Coronation and Flagstaff Parks received a huge amount of TLC from all of us in many ways throughout 2022 and are looking wonderful.

It is important to take a moment to celebrate the commitment of our small and dedicated group of Friends who volunteer consistently gardening, creating and running events, and applying for grants and other support. Not forgetting the regular wildlife counts and observations we do that feed into national statistics. We certainly punch above our weight in terms of our endeavours.

Without Kate Dixon’s expert guidance and active involvement, we simply could not function in the way we do. Thank you, Kate! Kate is, of course, employed by Northumberland County Council and it’s important to acknowledge NCC’s support of Kate and the Friends as well as the NEAT team’s contribution to the upkeep of the parks.

During the year, the Friends have worked effectively in partnership with many groups and organisations including Greener Berwick, Berwick Climate & Nature, Berwick Wildlife Group, the Swan and Wildlife Trust, and Northumbria Police.

Alongside our programme of mulching, pruning, weeding and planting in the parks, the team undertook all sorts of other activities. We held successful free family events and fundraisers, received awards and built our mailing list to 106 subscribers.

Our own fundraising, successful grant applications and generous donations mean that we continue to be in excellent health financially and will be exploring ways to invest some of our finances in activities in the parks in 2023. The Treasurer’s Report will give a detailed breakdown of our financial year.

From me, a quick and by no means exhaustive, quarterly round up of 2022:

January-March saw a Community Orchard tidy and the erection of a wooden sign explaining the orchard’s provenance. The bulbs came up to mark the late Queen’s Jubilee in Flagstaff, an owl box was erected, and NCC repaired the gates in Coronation Park. Willow weaving also took place with willow purchased from Rothbury. The series of Winter Talks concluded raising a magnificent £220 and a local group donated £422 from the *Life’s Good* theatrical event. Sadly, we cancelled our RSPB Birdwatch in the parks due to high winds. We invested in protective clothing for volunteer gardeners. We presented to the Town Council about Open Gardens, set up an Instagram account and became fully fledged members of the Berwick Festival Group for Open Gardens. Friends also helped install the beautiful seal bench on New Road commissioned by Peter Watts and dedicated to his late wife Jean. Berwick Town Council withdrew their contribution to Kate’s salary. The shortfall was thankfully picked up by NCC.

April-June the Easter Bunny Hunt (thanks for the eggs, Gordon – 63 were given away) attracted many families from in and around Berwick, the Dawn Chorus Walk netted 21 birdwatchers and 29 species, and the Plant Sale raised a stonking £506 – the sunflowers planted that day were a merry addition around Castle Vale Park later in the year. Alongside all the usual gardening, Kate and volunteers had another tidy of the orchard, created a Ukrainian bed in Coronation Park and built a new storage unit (courtesy of a successful bid for £1600 from Simpsons McCreath Trust) on our neighbour’s land. We investigated charitable status for the group but concluded it was not viable with our current income. A competition for designs for two sculptures to be placed in Flagstaff Park



was launched in the town's two middle schools. We received a donation of £120 from Margaret Shaw's catering work over the Jubilee weekend. A short lived attempt to once more hold our meetings at the Pilot Inn began.

July-September Our social media channels (thanks Valerie Bistram) and Mailchimp mailing list continued to make a huge difference to our ability to communicate more widely. A young person and his mentor from the Youth Project joined our volunteer gardening crew. Volunteers cleared along New Road, contributing yet more to the town's wellbeing. The Lily Pond was repaired by NCC. Talks about a composting scheme in Castle Vale began. The wildflower meadow was raked and cleared. Kate's shopping list for plants and equipment was agreed and will enhance the lives of the volunteer gardeners and visitors to the parks. Volunteers enjoyed a fabulous trip to David Warden's garden near Paxton. Open Gardens was the huge success we've all come to expect with fabulous feedback from garden openers and visitors alike (huge thanks to all the team and particularly Peter Bistram and his magic Open Garden wand which still worked despite his absence for the event this year). The event took an incredible £2,100. Lindsay Allason-Jones' garden party raised £494 (thanks Lindsay!). The Beastie Hunt followed hot on the heels of Open Gardens and was well attended and enjoyed by all. We became Sea the Change accredited Single Use Plastic Champions. We received Green Flag status for Coronation & Castle Vale Parks from Keep Britain Tidy and achieved 'Outstanding' in the RHS In Your Neighbourhood awards for all three parks. We installed the new grasshopper sculpture in the wildflower meadow – funded by a generous donation.

October-December Our series of Winter Talks kicked off in November with a talk from artists Charlie Poulsen and Pauline Burbidge with the December talk pushed over to January 2023 because of the big freeze. I gave a talk about the Friends and our work to Probus. An application was sent off to the RHS for £2500 to fund composting schemes in Castle Vale and Coronation Parks. Bark chippings from David Gibson and NCC allowed the Rose Garden to be thickly mulched by Kate and her two Thursday volunteers. The need for new volunteers – for events and committee work in particular – continues to be a hot topic. A group trip to the Granary Gallery for the Margaret Rebecca Dickinson exhibition was a fitting outing to conclude the year.

My warm thanks to every single person who has volunteered with us through 2022, attended our events, opened their gardens, made donations, used the parks, shared photos and cheered us on. You are the Friends of Castle Parks.

Jackie Kaines Lang

28 February 2023