

FRIENDS OF KINGS PARK STIRLING

Annual General Meeting October 2024: Chair's report for 2023-24

Introduction

I am pleased to report in my second year as Chair that over the past twelve months the Friends group has grown, delivered a range of projects in the Kings Park and improved our communications with the community and partner organisations. It has been an enjoyable and productive year.

Peace of Mind Garden and gardening activities

The focus of our volunteers' activities in the park is the Peace of Mind Garden. The past year has seen considerable change to its structure with new planting and a new path laid. We are grateful to Andrew and Carol Hipkin for their leadership of this and their donation of many plants. The grant we received from the People's Postcode Lottery funded a new tool box for the garden which is a welcome support for our volunteers.

We have continued to maintain the Butterfly border in the community garden and the wooden planters near to the tennis courts. Additionally, following discussions with Stirling Council in the wake of their reduced maintenance programme, we accepted responsibility for the planting and maintenance of the fountain parterres by the main park entrance and the 3-tier planter at the entrance by the tennis courts. Several volunteers grew cosmos plants from seed for the parterres and donations of other plants were received for here and the 3-tier planter. Our continued work in these areas will be dependent on volunteer availability.

At various times during the season, we have appreciated assistance from other volunteer groups including Recyke-a-bike and the Forth Valley U3A gardening group.

The Apple Orchard

Our volunteers have maintained the community orchard and have been pleased to see a good crop of apples this autumn. We installed a new Orchard information board funded from the Stirling Council Community Grants Scheme, and we had hoped to use this to promote a biodiversity hub in this area. However, the planting of wildflower seeds was not successful and other plans for children's activities were set aside following the closure of Stirling Council's Ranger Service. The hub is a project which needs a rethink in the coming year.

Park activities

We have been pleased to see the completion of the tennis courts refurbishment by the Lawn Tennis Association and Stirling Council, and to see the increase in tennis activity as a result.

There is a long tradition of planting commemorative trees in this royal park. It was continued in May when the Stirling Provost and Lord Lieutenant planted a tree to mark the coronation of King Charles III. The Friends group was pleased to assist in the choice of location and to attend the ceremony.

We welcomed Evelyn Tweed MSP to the park in July to meet our volunteers and see our various projects. She was impressed by our activities and provided some useful guidance on possible future funding opportunities.

As part of the Stirling 900 programme, we organised a guided walk of the history of the park as told through the mosaic panels. This attracted a small but enthusiastic group of attendees.

We have been liaising with Stirling Council on their plans to refurbish the play park and look forward to improvements in the coming year.

Drainage work was undertaken by Stirling Council on the main path in the vicinity of the play park following our requests. Regular flooding had been blocking the path, but the problem seems to have now been resolved.

Promotion and membership

We reviewed our marketing plan to focus our attention to raising awareness of the Friends group and on expanding our membership. A major innovation has been the production of a quarterly newsletter which we introduced in November last year. It is distributed directly to members and partner organisations by email, published on our website and posted on the park noticeboards. Thanks to Wendy Garcia for leading on this.

Our website has continued to be developed to include new features and is a good channel through which we can receive membership enquiries and general communications. Most notably this year, in response to suggestions, we introduced a donation facility on the website through the Charities Aid Foundation. It allows our members and supporters to make one-off or regular donations. We much appreciate Neil Fairweather's perseverance in delivering this.

We have continued to use social media, mainly via Facebook, and have been given a weekly slot in the Stirling Observer's "Voice of the People" section. Both help to raise community awareness of the Friends group.

Partnerships and liaison

We liaise regularly with Stirling Council officials, mainly from Land Services, but there has been decreased activity in the past year because of budget restrictions. We will be meeting again soon to discuss how we work together in the coming year.

Locally, we have built links with Stirlingshire Voluntary Enterprise and continue to liaise with the Kings Park Community Council. We have explored common areas of interest with Tree Link and Braehead Community Garden. We have worked with children from St Ninians Primary School on a planting project and a park visit. And a survey of park users was developed and carried out in association with students at Stirling High School. Our thanks to Sue Hunter for initiating this and following up with additional survey work and analysis.

Internationally, we have made a connection with the Friends group in the Kings Park in Perth, Western Australia. It has been interesting to compare the similarities and challenges faced by Friends organisations. Thanks to Neil Ross for taking time out of his holiday "down-under" to make these connections.

Organisation

The Group is managed by a committee of eight volunteers. A due diligence exercise led to a review of governance and all committee members are now formally appointed as directors and trustees of our charitable company. The composition of the committee changed last year with Wendy Garcia and Neil Ross being elected at last year's AGM. Unfortunately, during the year Moira Fairweather had to resign but we were pleased to co-opt Sue Hunter to fill the vacancy. My thanks to Moira for her earlier support for our activities.

We had seven committee meetings in person and one as a virtual meeting. Following last year's AGM we reviewed our priorities and set out an action plan to guide the use of our limited time and resources. A lot has been achieved and I am grateful to all committee members for their hard work over the past year.

Although Hector Currie had to step aside from the full role of Secretary earlier this year, I am grateful for his continued support on a range of activities and to Neil Fairweather for picking up some of the correspondence tasks. My thanks to Gordon Campbell for his duties as Treasurer and keeping us financially afloat.

Volunteers

Our greatest asset is our enthusiastic group of volunteers. We are a hard working and sociable group with an interest in all matters affecting the Kings Park and a particular like of the Pavilion Café! We welcome anyone interested to come along on Thursday mornings. And we hope to arrange another Christmas event for members to build on last year's successful party. Thank you all for your support.

David Leslie, Chair