

Friends of Hollinfare Cemetery AGM 11.11.2014 Chairs Report

Welcome to everyone and thank you for taking the time to attend tonight's AGM.

It is now 4yrs since the Friends group was formed and little did any of us know how successful and rewarding being part of the group would be. Our aim is to 'Improve the Look and Feel of the Cemetery' and I know that from the feedback we get we are achieving this thanks to the many volunteers and supporters who willingly and freely give their time and donations. Receiving the Green Flag for the 3rd year running is also acknowledgement of the ongoing improvements and community involvement.

Our 10 committee members have held 3 meetings this year to plan actions required for projects identified in the 5yr plan and to organise fundraising events – a big thank you to all the committee members for their commitment, time and donations. I would like to say a special thanks to:

- Pete, our Secretary, for liaising with volunteers and WBC and for the warm welcome and encouragement he has shown to new volunteers
- Paul, our Treasurer, for keeping the books balanced and spending wisely when purchasing new equipment and materials
- Sheila, our Grave Tending Scheme co-ordinator, for the sensitive approach she takes with relatives of the deceased and the time spent in her correspondence with them. Now in its 3rd year the scheme encompasses 27 graves, requiring monthly input from 2 grave cleaners, and brings in much needed regular funds to enable further planting and purchasing of additional tools and cleaning materials

Not only have Pete, Paul and Sheila carried out their admin roles so efficiently, but they also give endless hours of their time and energy in between action days in keeping projects on track, shopping, building, planting and watering.

Like previous years the past 12mths has been another busy and productive one. With the high level of volunteer input, many of the projects identified in the 5yr plan have now been completed or are well underway and we are able to keep on top of the ongoing work that the changing seasons bring, not least watering, pruning, tidying and leaf busting.

The 10 Action Days have been well attended with an average of 20 volunteers each month totally over 600 hours per year in volunteer time and resulting in an incredible 3,000 hours plus recorded, just on Action Days, since we started in 2010. It is always heartening to welcome new volunteers and it has been particularly pleasing to see several community minded youngsters join us this year. Donning their wellies and gloves our volunteers readily get stuck into the different tasks required on the day. Grafting is thirsty work and the much needed hot snacks made and delivered to the cemetery by the Friends of St. Helen's Church have been greatly appreciated.

As well as regular Action Days, there is also a lot of work that goes on in between time by several of our Friends and kind individuals that are encouraged to give a hand, if only on a one off basis. In particular I wish to thank Irene for her support with shopping and planting and Fred, our man on the ground, who can be seen more

than once each week pushing his mower around and leaving an ever growing green trail behind him.

Overall the cemetery is looking much tidier and brighter thanks to volunteer time and the kind donations both financial and in materials from local residents, supporters and relatives of the deceased. The fundraising efforts of our committee and Friends and the support of several funding bodies and local businesses has also enabled us to complete and commence several planned projects. This year alone the following improvements have been made:

- More sections around graves weeded and grassed over
- 4 new large planters installed and planted up with seasonal colour
- More spring bulbs planted
- A watering system installed to the front wall
- Recycling bays built, tidying up a previously scruffy area of the cemetery and providing a place to store donated soil and materials to aid further improvements and planting
- Wildflower border prepared, rotovated and planted
- A large percentage of headstones recorded - thanks to Joan's patience and interest in our heritage
- A Cubs Remembrance Garden introduced and bench and plaque installed and design started
- Extension made to the existing leaf compost
- Steps built to improve access to the memorials in the old section
- Old unused chemical toilet removed from the storeroom and a new sink, worktop, shelving and several tool hangings installed and new door locks fitted

Working in partnership with WBC Bereavement Services is key to moving improvements forward and we continue to build on our good relationship with them. In the past 12 months we have held a couple of cemetery site meetings throughout the year to discuss forthcoming plans and issues and WBC have made the following improvements:

- Identified and gradually removed a number of illegal edgings and grassed over plots which assists their grounds men and our volunteers in keeping the place mown and looking tidier
- Provided grid covers to all open grids, improving the safety of the cemetery
- Carried out Phase 1 of their Tree Care Plan which has lightened the look of the cemetery and helped grave carers feel less vulnerable when visiting alone
- Completed further memorial improvements down the main pathway with each one making a massive difference to the overall look of the cemetery

WBC have also held 3 Friends forums enabling us and other cemetery Friends groups in Warrington to share good practice and ideas.

Fundraising is essential to enable us to continue to make improvements. Thanks to all involved in organising events and for contributing prizes, food and selling tickets. A special thank you to Pete Dodd and Irene Clare for donating the bike for the Grand Xmas Raffle and to Anne and Neil McArthur for hosting the Spring Lunch. It was nice once again to enjoy a meal out together at our annual dinner which this year was held at the Red Lion and was well attended.

Publicity is important in terms of promoting the good work of the Friends and encouraging more volunteers to join us. This year the Friends have been supported by:

- Hamilton Davies Trust who support Mandy's time for printing and freely offer a venue for meetings. This year the Trust have also acknowledged the Friends work by awarding the group a Community Award, which Sheila was presented with in August
- The 'In the Know' newsletter which provides regular contact details for those wishing to get involved
- M44 and Warrington Guardian for publishing our successes
- rixtonwihglazebrook.net website shows images of the progress we are making and is an outlet for people to download information about the group
- Our Grave Tending Scheme which, whilst being an excellent service to relatives, also serves as an avenue to spread the word about the work we do, thanks to Sheila's progress updates in her correspondence.
- Word of mouth is of course the best form of publicity, so thanks to all the Friends who share their enthusiasm for the work they do and encourage others to join in the fun!

Moving Forward

Looking ahead there is still plenty to do and in the next 12 months we will continue with our regular action days and also hope to bring the following plans to fruition:

- A tree sculpture and new seat - Nov / Dec
- Completion of the Cubs Remembrance Garden
- Installation of a pathway from the new steps to the Friends bench and planting around it
- Painting of some if not all of the old railings

Alongside these we hope WBC will have the budget to complete phase 2 of the Tree Care Plan and make further memorial improvements as proposed.

Lastly I would like to thank all volunteers for their enthusiasm, kindness and company, making it a pleasure to be Chair of such an enthusiastic and productive group. I look forward to seeing what we can achieve together in 2015.

Keep up the good work!

Mandy