

Minutes From APCG Members' Meetings – March 2022

Meeting 1 – Monday 14th March 2022

Present: Steve B. (Chair), Tom (minutes), x9 members (names withheld)

1. Introductions and Matters arising from last meetings (November 2021):

- Steve welcomed everyone to the meeting, and explained the thinking behind holding meetings every four months instead of three. When invited no-one present raised any objections to this schedule
- A member raised the question of the new member experience, they felt that a formal induction plan would help new members to feel more comfortable settling in at the garden. This member offered their time giving new members an introductory guided tour. Steve updated those present on current and forthcoming measures taken to address this question since November. All present were invited to wear a 'Happy to Help' lanyard whenever they would like to help new members and visitors to feel welcome at the garden.
- As a volunteer keyholder, Steve informed those present that Saturday opening is going well. Volunteers are needed to help keyholders keep running Saturday opening hours – a new sign up sheet for April to July is soon to be published.
- Those present were invited to join the forthcoming drama group, to be led by a 'former drama teacher' of 30 years, beginning in March.
- As a keen volunteer cook, a member present was happy to report that things are going well with the Faversham Community Kitchen on Wednesdays and Fridays. They are also pleased to have been involved with helping to build the recently refurbished compost area.

2. Mental Health Awareness Week (w/c Monday 9th May):

- Steve explained plans for a 'chatty bench' in town during Mental Health Awareness Week 2022, collaborating with other local complementary social and mental health support organisations to make connections and raise awareness
- A member raised the possibility that the NHS might seek to take advantage of the garden and other local voluntary organisations, as they struggle to cope with self-reported loneliness as a concern for more than 90% of patients. Another member felt that the 'chatty bench' would raise awareness of local organisations whose purpose was to address this issue. A further member felt that loneliness was not a problem the NHS was set up to tackle and that strong community engagement and bringing together complementary organisations was a good approach.
- A member wondered if there was a pamphlet compiling local organisations who could work together on this, Steve has provided this to the garden team in the past and offered to do so again – this would be gratefully received by garden management.
- Another member wondered if local doctors' surgeries are aware of the garden as a place to refer patients, Steve and others reported that they are.

3. Tackling loneliness in the long term:

- All present were invited to consider this question, not just now but in the future, as a priority for the garden moving forward.
- A member mentioned that sometimes it can be difficult when speaking with visitors or members who are in crisis, not knowing how best to help. While it was agreed that a sympathetic ear would often be sufficient, Steve also mentioned that members can always suggest that anyone who is really struggling could speak with him or the garden team as a source of further support and signposting to professional help.

4. Platinum Jubilee / summer party - ideas?:

- Tom outlined the possibility of a summer garden / Jubilee party this year, mentioning a suggestion received through email for a 'homemade crowns' competition with a prize.

- Comments were made, leading to a discussion of whether, on average, members would like to formally celebrate the Jubilee in this manner, or simply have a 'non-demonitonal' summer garden party. A straw poll of those present showed eight to two in favour of a summer party rather than a Jubilee party, with one abstention.
- There was general agreement that holding 'Christmas in Summer' again this year would be nice.

5. **Some reminders and updates - OT placement, Qi Gong Tai Chi, Drama Group, FCS talking therapies, etc!:**

- Steve informed all present of the upcoming OT placement in April. Tom explained some of the ways we hope to make to make this year more rewarding for students and garden members. Steve wondered if there was a firm date for this to begin – not yet but the team will meet with a member of CCCU next week to finalise plans.
- A member suggested OT students could wear 'Happy to Help' lanyards to help identify them to members.
- Tom informed all present of the new connection made with Faversham Counselling Service. Leaflets are available in the cabin for members to take for themselves or pass on to others. Their bespoke talking therapy service and the ability to self-refer without seeing a GP were mentioned.
- A reminder to those present of the 'Quick Questionnaires' currently being filled in on paper at the garden, and online as of 14/3/22, led to an interesting discussion:
 - A member raised concerns that responses to questionnaires including members' names could be compromised or used irresponsibly.
 - There was discussion of ways to enable members who would like to participate, but would prefer to remain anonymous. It was suggested that members could use a pseudonym, or assign themselves a number. This way comparative data can still be recorded, without individuals disclosing their identity.
 - A different member felt that the questions being asked were not very personal or compromising. There was discussion, and it was felt that some would agree with this member, while others would want to feel that this information is being handled responsibly.
 - Tom clarified that the garden's policy is that filled-in forms be handed to a member of staff, or volunteer on duty in the cabin, at the members' discretion. Physical copies are stored safely before being entered into an electronic form and then destroyed. Electronic data is stored in password protected files, these are kept securely in online cloud storage, with access restricted to garden management and a single trustee with oversight responsibility for monitoring evaluation and learning activities at the garden. Also that any external uses made of collected data will be de-personalised, with either nameless fields of data, or individuals referred to only as 'garden members'.
 - A member wondered if some questions would require members to reflect on negative elements in their lives. Steve clarified that the new questions on the form are taken verbatim from a nationally recognised system for measuring wellbeing (the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale).
 - Steve made the case for the value of ongoing comparative data in demonstrating the benefits and impacts of the garden to current and potential funders. A member wondered if this created a pressure for members to respond positively. Tom explained that the most meaningful, valuable data would always come from an open and honest reflection of how members are really feeling.
 - Tom further clarified that participation in any and all forms of monitoring, evaluation and learning feedback at the garden was voluntary, and that no one should feel pressure to participate if they would prefer not to.

6. **Cabin reopening:**

- Tom clarified that, as there is no longer any guideline or legal restriction preventing it, the cabin is essentially open once again for members to use for refreshments. There was general approval of this.

- A member wondered if any anxious members used to taking refuge in the cabin would find this difficult. It was suggested that the warmer weather would hopefully allow anyone who would rather not be in close proximity to others indoors to remain outside.
- Steve wondered if the garden had changed its official opening days. Tom explained that the gate has remained open on a couple of occasions recently, initially inadvertently, then as an informal way of gauging members' responses. There has been no negative feedback. A member hoped that any formal changes to garden opening days would involve member consultation, Tom reassured those present that no formal changes had been made, and would indeed require consultation.
- A member related a recent occurrence when the garden had been left closed during formal public opening hours (a last minute cancellation by the scheduled keyholder), which had left a visiting group unable to access the garden. Tom clarified that this cancellation had been announced on social media (Facebook, WhatsApp), but acknowledged that this message had not reached all potential visitors in this case.

7. AOB:

- A member suggested that the ukulele and guitar strumming group could use a bit more formal leadership and structure. Tom suggested a possible outline for this structure, which was trialled with some success later on 14/3.
- Another member pointed out the hard work which has been done over the winter in removing all but part of one of the plum trees infected with silver leaf fungal disease. It was suggested that re-planting could be difficult:
 - a large amount of root remains in the soil as an infection vector to which almost any fruit tree could be susceptible.
 - A tea bush was suggested by this member as a potential plant of interest for this part of the garden, which would minimise shade of vegetable beds and be less susceptible to this disease. There was some approval for this idea, with two members leading a discussion of the need to ensure that this ericaceous plant was properly cared for – Epsom salts as an acidifying agent, and rain water for irrigation were suggested.
 - Tom asked if the season would permit this to happen this side of summer – it was felt this would be possible, but would require a rapid decision to be reached.
 - Blueberry and coffee plants were also suggested.
 - A member expressed the personal preference for no additional planting, but also the need for a community decision to be reached.
 - Two members expressed feelings in favour of a tea bush.
- A member expressed approval for the work of the garden in general, but reiterated concerns about the spread of silver leaf in plants at the garden.
- Another member asked if plans for redeveloping the rose garden were going ahead. Tom explained that this has slipped, most likely until next winter at soonest, as other priorities took up time over winter 21-22, but that it was still on the back burner.
- The same member also asked about current plans for decking / redeveloping the café cabin area. Tom outlined the latest developments here: large hexagonal slabs instead of decking, work to be carried out by garden staff and volunteers. The need to ensure that this was done in an aesthetically pleasing way, sympathetic to surrounding landscaping and structures, was discussed.
- Steve thanked all present for attending, informing everyone that the next week of meetings was due to take place in July, dates TBD.