

## Minutes From APCG Members' Meetings – March 2022

### Meeting 3 – Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Present: Steve B. (Chair), Tom (minutes), Gulliver (Trustee rep), Suzanne (Garden Manager), x10 members (names withheld)

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

- Steve called the meeting to order and went over some of the actions since last year's meetings, including inviting all present to consider wearing a 'Happy to Help' lanyard from the cabin.
- Steve explained the new thrice-yearly schedule for members' meetings, Tom reminded everyone about the monthly coffee mornings and BBQs at the garden as social events in-between members' meetings.
- A member thanked Tom for taking the minutes again – you're welcome!
- Steve covered a number of other points:
  - Saturday attendance numbers are on the up;
  - invitation to attend new Drama group;
  - 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' are taking shape now;
  - thank you to a member of the Men's Shed for making the sturdy trestle frame for the new large whiteboard;
  - the new bike rack is also a hit;

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

- Suzanne explained the thinking behind the 'chatty bench' scheme for MHAW, partnering with Umbrella, AGE UK, West Faversham Community Association, Faversham Foodbank, Women's Institute, Youth Council, to raise awareness about these complementary organisations. It is hoped this can take place not just during MHAW, but also during 'Loneliness Awareness Week' in June.
- There was general approval for this idea. Gulliver made the point that this should focus on the positive aspect of increasing happiness and creating connections rather than reducing the negative loneliness. Suzanne suggested the slogan 'Happy to Chat'. A member pointed out that the theme of loneliness is taken from the national scheme.
- A member raised the possible social stigma attached to admitting loneliness, and the increased need for this due to the ongoing isolating impacts of the COVID pandemic.
- Another member suggested a complementary video / social media element to MHAW. It was felt that this good idea would require one or two relatively skilled volunteers to facilitate and film. Students from QE Grammar School were suggested.
- This member also suggested the possibility of commandeering an existing bench in town – the one opposite the town hall is apparently already a bit of an informal social hub. It was agreed that there aren't enough benches in town. The team is looking into this possibility.
- Suzanne explained that permission has been gained for a bench, gazebo and other equipment brought from the APCG to be stored on the premises of AGE UK as this is immediately adjacent to the town centre.
- A member suggested that a bench from the garden could be sanded and painted attractively to form the focal point of the chatty bench pitch in town. Gulliver suggested connecting with a local garden centre if an appropriate bench is not available at the garden.

#### 3. Tackling loneliness in the long term:

- A member felt that getting people to come to the garden was the trick, raising awareness and extending invitations.
- Suzanne explained that the garden is doing more to get physical leaflets and flyers out into the local community, as we have become very reliant on social media during the pandemic. Steve B and a member present volunteered to be available to help distribute APCG bump as needed. Another member suggested

that any material distributed include a map or directions to find the garden – the main printed APCG flyer does have this, flyers may not.

- A member suggested that the closed black gate to the garden may be a bit daunting and off-putting to passers-by and potential new members. Suzanne said that this has been reported by members of the local community, Another member agreed that this was their experience too. It was asked if the gate needed to be black, Suzanne explained that the disposition of the gate is in the hands of the landlords – the Grammar School Trust.
- Steve asked those present how they would feel about the gate being open more, at the current stage of the pandemic. Gulliver pointed out that COVID infection rates are currently rising rapidly, and a member echoed this.
- It was generally agreed that more welcoming signage in the alley would be a great help in this regard. A member suggested the return of the A-frame boards, Suzanne has the materials for this and help is being sought from the Men's Shed to assemble them. Another large, curvaceous pennant like that which used to be displayed daily in the alley during opening was another popular suggestion.
- The question of the chickens during gate-open hours was raised – no solution has been proposed but this is a matter of ongoing consideration.
- Steve brought this topic to a conclusion by pointing out that while infection rates are up, deaths from COVID are significantly down.

#### **4. Platinum Jubilee / summer party - ideas?:**

- The interesting contrast in the majority opinions of previous days' meetings regarding whether or not to acknowledge the Jubilee was noted – Monday generally against, Tuesday very much for. Positive opinions were expressed today. It was felt that most things will be divisive on some level, but that individuals would be able to decide for themselves if they wanted to be involved or not.
- Ideas included:
  - tea party
  - mask party
  - bunting around the garden – discussion of the official Jubilee colours (apparently purple and silver). A member present is also a member of the WI who are preparing bunting for other events, they offered to see if this can be made available for an APCG event on a different day.
- Gulliver suggested we find out what other events are taking place to avoid scheduling conflicts. Suzanne agreed the event could take place whenever, not necessarily during the official four-day bank holiday weekend in early June. A member suggested our event could be towards the end of June. Another member pointed out that Friday 26<sup>th</sup> June is already Open Gardens. Suzanne suggested the first week of July and / or potentially combining this with the AGM.

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

- Steve updated those present on the upcoming second OT student placement beginning in April.
- Steve informed everyone of the availability of Faversham Counselling Service to all as a source of bespoke talking therapies. This led a member to prompt another member present to begin an interesting discussion of 'havening' as a source of complementary alternative therapy:
  - as someone with professional expertise this member described the origins, neuroscientific underpinnings, and benefits of havening. The technique uses gentle physical contact and carefully guided thought to help break the cycle of post-traumatic stress disorder.
  - A member was able to speak from personal experience of the benefits of havening in coping with and overcoming trauma.
  - Suzanne asked how this could be brought to the garden, perhaps as part of the growing 'Wellbeing Wednesdays', while recognising the need for the member in question to make money from their work. This member generously offered to provide this service to the garden voluntarily. The same

member suggested this could even be a weekly activity at the garden, most likely as a group session at first, and possibly one-to-one if needed.

- Another member asked if it would be necessary for members of a group havening session to divulge the particular personal traumatic experiences they are seeking to work on. The original member said this is not necessarily part of a group experience, but would likely be a part of any one-to-one sessions which came about as a result of first taking part in a group at the garden.

- Those present thanked this member for bringing an interesting addition to today's meeting.

## 6. Cabin reopening:

- Steve updated those present on the current situation with 're-opening' the cabin (see previous day's minutes). Tom brought up concerns raised at Tuesday's meeting by some of the regular cabin volunteers, and it was agreed that it would be appropriate for the cabin to continue to be closed off by using a table as a serving counter during busy hours, particularly when open to the public.

## 7. Trustee update

- Steve invited Gulliver to speak to and update those present on behalf of the garden's trustees.
- Gulliver began by thanking Steve for chairing, and Suzanne and Tom for helping to administer and contribute to this week's meetings.

- Gulliver proposed a question for discussion by those present: 'is the garden still a place where people can come to find peace and quiet if they would like?':

- A member agreed that they have aired reservations about this themselves, and has heard this from others.

- Steve felt this made the case for continuing to have at least some days when the garden gate remains closed. Gulliver agreed that a continuing balance would be healthy.

- A member felt that even when busy, there was usually a quiet corner to be found out in the garden for those who needed one, such as the benches and chairs in the Moon Garden.

- Suzanne agreed that this should always be a consideration and an ongoing conversation. She noted that it is an evolving situation, citing the relatively recent inversion from Wednesdays to Fridays as typically the busiest day at the garden.

- There was general agreement that an update and reformat of the current activities sheets would help make it much easier for members to work out when to visit the garden if they would like to find it less busy. Tom to look into this.

- A member felt that this was to some extent the price of success, and suggested that the team advise those with 'Happy to Help' lanyards to unobtrusively seek to help new members and visitors to find a quiet time to be at the garden if desired.

- Steve noted that the changing seasons should bring improved weather and more foliage to help create the little nooks and corners and garden 'rooms' which bring a greater sense of privacy to parts of the garden.

- Gulliver felt that the garden should always seek to remain a haven, and there was general agreement that this should be a permanent agenda item at future members' meetings.

- Additionally, Gulliver asked if a colour had been selected for repainting the cabins yet. Suzanne confirmed that the final decision had not been taken. A member felt that this should be anything but grey! Suzanne and others agreed wholeheartedly. This member also suggested a company as a good alternative to Sadolin paints (I think it was Varna paints? – Tom).

## 8. AOB:

- A member enquired as to the date of any upcoming meetings regarding the forthcoming OT student placement.

- Another member suggested a pre-summer party planning meeting.

- A further member updated those present on developments in the Tuesday Horticulture classes. Last week saw the visit of the External Verifier from the National Open College Network. This member relayed his very positive comments about the garden and the work of Paul Muddle in teaching the subject to a diverse group of students. The same member outlined the work taking place to establish the 'Externally Verified Level 2 Equivalent' qualification the garden hopes to offer soon.
- This member also enquired how the horticulture course is advertised to prospective new students. Suzanne clarified the developing nature of the group over the past two years, leading to a situation where it has seemed best to avoid formal advertising, but rather to speak about it personally with new and prospective members who express an interest in the subject, as well as representatives of organisations who refer their clients to the garden for support with issues including mental health and employment.
- The same member mentioned the possibility for other projects around the garden to begin offering qualifications (catering, hospitality, etc.). All present thanked Paul, and the member in question as Internal Verifier, for their hard work in adding this powerful new string to the garden's bow.
- Suzanne updated everyone on developments at the garden as a 'Land Learning Centre' for permaculture. With the involvement of permaculture and foraging expert Jo Barker, plans are developing to make the APCG the 'East Kent Permaculture Learning Centre'. As a centre of excellence, Jo would then be able to use the garden to spread the word about permaculture to members and non-members alike. A member present agreed that Jo is someone who really knows their stuff and walks their talk.
- A member present agreed with Suzanne that the presence of more trained permaculturalists would be a wonderful thing.
- Steve thanked everyone for attending, and invited everyone to come to the next week of meetings in July.