

Minutes From APCG Members' Meetings – March 2022

Meeting 4 – Thursday 17th March 2022

Present: Suzanne C. (Chair), Tom (minutes), x15 members (names withheld)

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

- Suzanne welcomed everyone to the meeting, inviting all present to introduce themselves and recognising some individual contributions members present have made to the garden recently, including a member present taking on a role representing members with autism.
- Suzanne covered some of the actions taken since the last meetings in November. Including inviting all present to take a turn wearing a 'Happy To Help' lanyard. This scheme has allowed staff and volunteers to engage with new members and visitors in a way that is intended to be helpful but unintrusive, recognising the anxiety some may be feeling. This to be complemented by new A-frame boards soon to be build by the men's shed.
- Drop-in IT sessions were mentioned, these have been popular and useful in providing essential IT support to members. A member present was interested and was invited to bring their tablet device in to see if we can be of help.
- Qi Gong will start on the first Wednesday of each month. A member present who will run these sessions explained the meaning of the name, and some of the benefits. It can be done from a seated position, members present were interested.
- Thanks shared to the men's shed for the new daily message board.
- Cooking sessions due to be expanded soon to include other week days.

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

- The theme of loneliness and the 'chatty bench' were discussed. Members present were invited to get involved during MHAW (May) and Loneliness Awareness Week (June). Suzanne confessed that her favourite phrase of late "Connections change lives" had been stolen from the United Nations!

3. Tackling loneliness in the long term:

- A member present felt this was a big question, others agreed. Suzanne invited everyone to keep this question in mind and bring along any ideas they have at any point in the future.
- Another member felt that loneliness is an issue for the people in the streets around where they live, made worse by everything going on in the world at the moment. This member also said that they felt that the community outreach gardening the APCG used to do did help to alleviate this.
- A further member wondered if the garden could seek to reach more young people by making contact with local youth groups. Suzanne said that we are currently hoping to collaborate with the Faversham Youth Council.
- A member raised the fact that not everyone has access to the internet, it was felt that the garden should try make use of more traditional forms of communication as well where possible.

4. Platinum Jubilee / summer party - ideas?:

- Suzanne invited those present to share ideas, and whether people would prefer to celebrate the Jubilee itself or have a summer party event less connected to the national celebrations.
- Those who shared their feelings with the meeting felt that they would prefer any event be less connected to the Jubilee and the royal family. Some present expressed critical personal opinions of the institution of the monarchy. Tom invited anyone who would like to speak up for the opposing view to feel safe to do so, as there have been opinions shared from all sides of the discussion at different meetings this week. The feeling

was expressed that the garden should be a place where all views are welcome. Some who spoke on this subject did also share happy childhood memories of the Queen's coronation in 1953.

- A member felt that the celebrations should be focused on making it through the past two years of the pandemic.
- The dates of the national events were discussed, and local events including the 'picnic in the park' at the Faversham Recreation Ground, with live music and refreshments, on Sunday 6th June.

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

- Suzanne and Tom updated and informed those present about the upcoming OT placement, and the services offered by Faversham Counselling Service in Gatefield lane. Flyers for FCS are available for members and friends to access this service.
- A member enquired when the upcoming members' coffee mornings are due to take place. Tom informed them that the next are on Wednesday 6th April, and Monday, 9th May. Another member was not aware of the coffee mornings, those present who have been to one enthusiastically invited them and everyone along for freshly ground coffee and cakes.

6. **Cabin reopening:**

- Suzanne updated those present on the increased availability of the cabin, which is now free for members to access to make refreshments. Access to the cabin will now only be restricted when volunteers inside are serving during particularly busy times.
- A member asked if the cabin is now available as a venue for small group activities, Suzanne explained that for the time being it will be for people seeking refreshments or shelter from the elements.

7. **AOB:**

- Suzanne invited each member present in turn to raise any other business.
- A member suggested that, as the garden gets busier, signposted areas could be designated as quiet spots for those who would like to enjoy a more peaceful environment. This member remembered that the Wildlife Garden used to be informally set aside for this purpose. Suzanne felt that a forthcoming information pack for members should include this.
- Another member, seconded by many others present, stated for the record their appreciation to a member present for all of the wonderful cakes they have been donating to the garden lately, particularly at the monthly coffee mornings. Tom was particularly grateful for the dairy free alternatives which they have baked – the fruit scones were excellent!
- A further member raised again the importance of tackling the issue of loneliness. It was agreed this should remain a high priority for the garden.
- A new member present felt a bit overwhelmed (*in a good way I think!* – Ed.), having taken part in this meeting during their first real visit to the garden! Suzanne suggested that coming along to the next coffee morning would be a great way to engage with the garden in a much more relaxed, informal and sociable setting.
- A member updated those present on the removal of the plum trees and the planting of new apple trees over the winter. All recognised the hard work of volunteers in uprooting and disposing of the infected plum trees. The new varieties of apple are 'Scrumptious' and 'Red Devil' – named for the national parachute display team!
- Another member offered the garden divisions from their giant snowdrops, Tom and Suzanne weren't immediately sure where these would be planted, but we would be sure to find a place. A member suggested that the volunteers at Cooksditch stream would have lots of room to plant these, they offered to put the original member in touch with someone who is working on this project.
- A member echoed previous comments that they appreciate times when the garden is quieter, it was noted that Friday mornings when they often attend the garden are amongst the busiest times of the week, other

quieter days and times were suggested. Another member felt that at its busiest in the summer, the garden may be less able to help those who need it most. Suzanne and a member noted that members of the local community value finding the garden gate open, and others present suggested replacing the large pennant which used to be displayed in the alley to welcome passers-by.

- A member wondered if the garden has longer opening hours in the summer. Suzanne and Tom clarified that the garden often informally remains open for longer during the summer, but that this is unlikely to be formally extended for staffing reasons.
- This member also recorded enthusiastic gratitude for the new(ish!) bike rack now available for cyclists visiting the garden.
- A member suggested a suggestion box!
- Two members present would like to see plant labelling at the garden. Different media were suggested – from wooden pyrography, tin, slate, and up to professionally engraved ‘Kew Gardens’ style labelling. It was recognised that some suggestions would require significantly more work on the part of staff and volunteers to put in place. Suzanne agreed that this is a key ambition for the garden this year, dependent upon funding.
- A member thanked another member present for sharing information about the new trees, noting that the information gained from events like the guided tree tour from a member of Faversham Tree Wardens last year provides much useful context for their own tours of the garden for new members and visitors.
- This member also shared that garden staff all completed national Level 2 First Aid qualifications under their tutelage in 2021. They have been setting occasional surprise ‘tests’ of simulated casualties for staff to treat since. This member singled out Tom for particular praise in handling this (aw shucks 😊), and assured us there would be more to come!
- The same member suggested that this training could also be extended to members and volunteers at the garden in 2022, some present were keen to take part in this.
- This member informed those present that we have a defibrillator in the cabin at the garden.
- Suzanne thanked everyone for attending, next week of meetings in July.