

Friends of St. Giles Hill Park

Winchester



Annual Report 2024-25

June 2025

1. Overview

Friends of St. Giles Hill Park was registered as a charity on 24th April 2023. Its objects are: -
“For the benefit of visitors to and the inhabitants of Winchester and the surrounding area (‘the area of benefit’), to provide or assist in the provision of facilities for recreation and other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare with the object of improving the conditions of life for the inhabitants of the area of benefit, in particular but not exclusively by the preservation, promotion, support, assistance and improvement of St. Giles Hill Park.”

This is our second annual report. This year our priorities have been: -

1. To continue assisting in the maintenance of the St. Giles Hill Park in accordance with the 5-year Management Plan agreed by the Town Forum in March 2023.
2. To engage in dialogue with the local authority at all levels in order to develop our relationship.
3. To run events which build public awareness and support for our activities and give residents opportunities to experience the natural world on their doorsteps.

Our goal is to become a “Key Partner” as defined by the Parks Community on their ladder of engagement. Whilst welcoming the formation of the Friends, the local authority has initially limited our ability to make contributions. During the year they have increasingly taken note of our activities and at the year-end we have advanced drafts of both a legal Licence and an informal Partnership Agreement*. Once signed and implemented these will provide the framework for us to become a partner and enable us to make a much more significant contribution to the future management and development of the park.

2. Governance

The Friends of St. Giles Hill Park is a registered charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) with a standard CC constitution for a foundation CIO.

During the year we have continued to implement the Governance plan approved by the Trustees. Development has focused on the risk assessments and method statements for working parties of volunteers with a view to the future use of power tools and for internal and external events as the number and range of these events has expanded.

A Trustee Manual continues to develop in line with our activities. We do not work directly with minors or vulnerable adults in order to minimise the risk of any safeguarding issues.

3. Membership

Our main tools for increasing engagement are our web site and social media platforms. To maintain interest and attract people to visit the site we distribute a monthly Newsletter. This reports on and publicises our events and other activities.

In May 2024 we held our first Gathering of Friends and were joined by over 50 people including local Councillors and representatives of the Hampshire Gardens Trust and the CPRE Magnificent Meadows Project. This gave Friends the opportunity to learn more about our activities and plans and discuss these and other issues of concern.

We have been fortunate to receive support from the Mayor, Cllr Russell Gordon-Smith, who hosted a reception after our "Autumn Colours" walk and in January 2025 planted a commemorative tree to mark the 130th Anniversary of the extension to the park laid out by H.E. Milner in 1895.

During the year our Chairman, Dr. Harry Mycock led several walks around the park including two historical walks as part of the Heritage Open Days week in September, which were fully subscribed. These are opportunities to raise awareness of the long history and heritage of the park. An evening event to meet the local bats was fully subscribed and led to further interest and the start of a bat survey in Spring 2025.

We collaborated with a local tourist guide in her preparation of an on-line self-guided walking tour of the St. Giles Hill which we both promote.

Our activities have continued to attract press coverage and Friends online registrations continue to increase our number.

4. Volunteer Activities

Regular working parties have been held throughout the year. We hold two per month, one on the first Wednesday and the second on the last Saturday. Activities included planting of cowslips and bluebells, primula and daffodils (all wild natives) and trial sowing of ransoms and yellow rattle to enhance the wild flower meadow and tree habitats. Other works have included nurturing the trees planted in December 2023 and removing invasives and other undesirable vegetation in the Milner enclosure, where Winchester City Council (WCC) have joined us in an extra effort to complete the works in the 5-year Management Plan.

Regular removal of graffiti has improved the appearance of the park.

Some 204 hours of time has been spent in practical gardening work by volunteers during the year, a disappointing reduction on our first year. This was a direct consequence of contractors unfortunately destroying bio-diversity planting made by the previous volunteer group in 2013, which led to a number withdrawing their time.

Our nature walks and outreach events have been well received. A considerable investment continues to be made in research including surveys in the park and historical research. Surveys completed this year include ones on memorial trees and steps. These will aid future planning of maintenance and improvement projects and allow us to measure our impact.

We are building an image archive which is proving very informative.

When these activities and administrative time are included we estimate a total volunteer contribution of more than 1500 hours for the year.

5. Finance

We launched an appeal for Friends to become “Supporters” by making a regular annual or monthly donation at the Gathering held in May 2024. This met a positive response and monthly donations have since provided the income needed to sustain our activities and meet our costs over the year.

Fund-raising appeals and grant applications are on hold until the relationship with the local authority is resolved and we can agree improvement projects or have other reasons to justify the need for additional finance.

Our main administrative expenses are insurance and IT services. Minor expenditures have included some disposables, safety gear, more tools and planting materials such as plants, seeds, bulbs, trays and compost. Accounts are shown in Appendix 1

6. Other Activities

We continue to develop our relations with a wide range of local organisations. We attend meetings of local community associations and work with similar volunteer groups active within the Winchester area to share resources and expertise.

Co-operation with WCC saw a rapid response to anti-social activities with restoration works at the viewpoint and our relationship continues to develop. They completed a major project on slope stabilisation and made further progress with tree works, including re-opening an important view. Two old benches were re-instated and a new bench installed at our request.

During the year we started collaborating with the Hampshire Bat Group on a bat survey and renewed our support for the CPRE in a grant application for their Bar End Wild Ways project. We are developing our relations with the City of Winchester Trust due to the importance of the park to the landscape setting of the City. We continue to liaise with the Hampshire Gardens Trust and others and on discovering the history of the park and Victorian development East of the River Itchen.

**NB Post end of year a Licence Agreement was formally agreed with Winchester City Council on 24th May 2025 giving permission to use power tools and hold events and a further Partnership Agreement was signed on the 3rd of July.*

Front cover: Photo of Winchester Mayor, Cllr Russell Gordon Smith, Lady Mayor, Chairman Dr. Harry Mycock and Friends at the commemorative tree planting to celebrate 130th Anniversary of the laying out of the park extension donated by the Earl of Northbrook by the celebrated Victorian landscape designer H.E. Milner.

APPENDIX 1

Summary Financial Statement

FSGHP Summary Financial Report

Period 06/04/24 to 05/04/25

CAF balances as at 06/04/24 925

Income

Donations via CAF (see details seperately)	1611.15
Tap donation via Square	261.70
Interest	1.56

Total Income 1874.41

Expenditure

Workgroup equipment	478.52
Logo development	100.00
Bank fees	55.00
Insurance 24/25	157.00
AGM venue	48.00
Office equipment	22.80
Brush-cutter training	40.009
Trees & seeds	693.92

**Total
Expenditure 1964.24**

CAF Balance as at 05/04/25 835