

# Friends of Graves Park



Charity no: 1080407

Winter 2022-23

Perhaps this time they will listen and act in the best interests of Graves Park? Who knows? We have been here before. The Friends of Graves Park have been in existence for 24 years and have had charitable status for 23. In that time we have fought to keep the generous gift of J. G. Graves intact, to preserve and restore where we can this unique and most fascinating park. Council officers who were sympathetic to our work and who knew about the park's history and importance, were moved on to pastures new, while replacements knew nothing about the park, its history or importance to the citizens of Sheffield and were ripe to be briefed on the Friends of Graves Park by who knows who.

**New threats to the park's assets** continue every few years. The council continues to try and dispose of bits of the park, while at the same time doing the absolute minimum of maintenance, thus once again being able to declare parts of the park "derelict", "surplus to requirements", or "end of life" as an excuse for demolition or disposal.

## Clearing the Himalayan Balsam

The Friends and volunteers spent much of the summer systematically clearing the invasive Himalayan Balsam and we are glad to report that it was very successful. As we will need to repeat the

process in summer 2023 and 2024, we will be asking volunteers to join us again in "pulling up" sessions between June and August. Many thanks go to our own membership, the Woodseats Playground Group, as well as the team from HMRC, who did a sterling job at the Woodseats end.



Himalayan Balsam Clearing July 2022



To support us, please donate here.

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## Introduction from the Chairman

Welcome to the Friends of Graves Park's latest winter newsletter. A lot has happened over the past 6 months; for updates on our project application, the Rose Garden Café closure and our Arboretum Extension, read on.

## Finding Lost Norton Park: Digging Deeper for All

Following the highly successful National Lottery Heritage Fund supported project "Finding Lost Norton Park" in 2019, the Friends of Graves Park are delighted to announce that we have succeeded in being awarded a £142,770 grant, from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to run the sequel "Digging Deeper for All". For more details and updates, please see our "Digging Deeper for All" programme, or visit our heritage website, on the back page. Everyone is welcome to join in with this great adventure!



Example of Fungi in Graves Park July 2019

## The Arboretum Extension in Graves Park: Update

When the Friends' Freedom of Information request about Norton Nurseries came back in July, confirming that there have been enquiries from April 2021 regarding development on the site, but refusing to state what these are, we decided to pursue another complaint to the Charity Commission. The Friends continue to seek permission to restore the next section of the old Norton Nurseries site to parkland and the council continue to procrastinate and instead refer to this charitable parkland as "depot land", while making their own

plans for the site behind the scenes. Our latest FOI response from SCC now **denies** that the site **has ever been a council depot**, even though it is labelled as such on Google maps and even though rubbish continues to arrive every day from various parks and open spaces around Sheffield. We are extremely concerned that, despite the introduction of committees to the organisation of the council, nothing appears to have changed and it is “business as usual” as far as the council is concerned.

**We contacted the councillor** who chairs the parks committee months ago, but so far have had no response on this issue other than an acknowledgement.

**The Friends will be writing again** to the Charity Commission, to share this latest FOI response and to alert them to the contradiction between what the Council says is happening on the site and what is happening in reality.

## Renovating the Rose Garden Cafe

**The masters of procrastination**, aka Sheffield City Council, have successfully kept the Rose Garden Café closed throughout the summer and autumn, doing an excellent job of kicking the can down the road when it comes to renovation or reopening. The Friends would have been delighted to be proved wrong, however, true to form, the



Rose Garden Café with Scaffolding. November 2022

council is keeping demolition on the options list and continues to repeat the phrases “the building is at the end of life” and “we will have to do a city-wide survey to find out what all the people of Sheffield want regarding the café in Graves Park”.

**The permission granted** for the Friends to fund their own building survey, has now come to fruition, after SCC finally agreed to prop up the building and completed its own further surveys. Thankfully, the café has finally been allowed to reopen, but in a very limited space, so can only provide take-away service at the moment. The Friends are somewhat puzzled by the extensive scaffolding which is filling the interior, as well as the scaffolding (not propping) at the front of the building. It took the council 5 months to come up with a plan to prop up the building (allegedly), involving so much scaffolding that it is difficult for the café operators to work in

there. Despite this, the staff are doing an excellent job and at the moment, the café appears to be doing well. We hope you will all continue to support them. With the council’s plans to “explore all options” through to February 2023, the Friends despair of any real movement before spring of 2023. However, we have an agreement with the council that they will work with us to secure funding for the renovation and restoration of this much loved building. We also have a list of places to apply for grants, which we will explore as soon as we have a costed scheme in place. **What else can we do?**

**The Friends continue** to run our refurbishment fundraiser, even though as yet we have no costs to work on. We continue to work with the “**Save the Rose Garden Café**” group, who have been brilliant at raising the profile of the campaign and getting signatures on their petition. We continue to attend meetings with the council regarding the café and to ask questions regarding the issue. We have also complained to the Charity Commission about Graves Park’s appalling treatment by the council, in being one of the largest parks in the country without a proper café. The number of visitors this summer was noticeably down, even on the sunniest and most pleasant of days. We will continue to keep the Charity Commission informed.

**We hope that you will all continue** to support us and spread the word that the café is open and that there are plans to restore the building. We will not rest until the restoration is guaranteed.



Surveying Graves Park North Wall, with Bole Hill Farm in the background, May 2019

## Sale of the Freehold of Bole Hill Farm

**When the Friends were told** by council officers that the council was “obliged” to sell the freehold to the owner of Bole Hill Farm, despite the land being designated charitable land belonging to the Graves Park trust, this was yet another blow. (Bole Hill Farm was unlawfully sold by leasehold back in 1982.) In the mess of the closure of the Rose Garden Café, the council is keen to stress that it takes its role as trustee very seriously, yet we see very little evidence of this. As I write this, we are putting in yet another complaint to the Charity Commission, as we cannot find any power of sale in the original conveyances, nor in the 2009 Scheme.