



## **Annual Review 2025**

## **Contents**

Foreword

Structure & Governance

Strategy, Objectives & Planning

Secretariat

Treasury & Fundraising

Partnerships

Membership & Volunteers

Communications, Marketing & Promotional Events

Technology

Projects, Programmes & Social Events

Looking Forward

## Foreword

We have now completed another fantastic year since inauguration in January 2020.

This last year has built upon previous success: maturing our committee, expanding our engagement, building our volunteer base, securing funds and growing and using our influence.

You'll find in this report details about how we're run, our objectives and strategy, finances, a snapshot of our activities for the year gone by and a heads-up on the year ahead.

I couldn't be prouder of what we've achieved to-date and I'm sure we can continue to grow as *a FoRCE for good*.

**Terry Clennell**

**Chair**

**Friends of Rochester Churchfields and Esplanade**

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## **Structure & Governance**

### **AGM**

We held our latest Annual General Meeting in Autumn where we (re)lected a committee. The next AGM will be held in autumn next year. Details of our AGMs and previous annual reviews can be found on the [governance page](#) of our website.

### **Constitution**

Our constitution is the bedrock of the group. It sets out the governance and establishes our purpose. [Read our constitution.](#)

### **Committee**

Our committee is made up entirely of volunteers. In order to run most effectively, the committee requires a mixture of portfolios/roles, which can be grouped as follows:

- Leadership: Chair; Vice Chair
- Management: Secretary; Treasurer
- Resources & Relationships: Fundraising; Partnerships; Membership & Volunteers
- Delivery: Events; Comms & Marketing, Tech, River, Maintenance

Not all of these roles have been occupied, though we're very proud to have recruited some great additional committee volunteers this last year, as well as bidding farewell to some as they roll off to pastures new.

Our current committee is:

- Chair – Terry Clennell
- Vice Chair – Natalie Poulton
- Secretary – Courtney Wilson
- Treasurer – Jean Skilling
- Fundraising – vacant
- Partnerships – Terri Zbyszewska
- Membership & Volunteers – Jacques Parker
- Comms & Marketing – Natalie Poulton
- Events – Jo Summers
- Tech – Kristian Hansen
- River – Kristian Hansen
- Maintenance – Aileen Smith
- Horticulture – Vacant
- Without portfolio – Will Kingsland

Of note, we've created a new Maintenance portfolio in recognition of all the work that we're now doing in this field, and we're seeking a new Horticulture role for our green projects. Alongside our River and Events roles, these make up the oversight of the full suite of our hands on, front-of-house, volunteer activities, and replaces the Projects, Programmes and Events role which was too broad for our scale. (Our Events role also covers promotional events, in addition to social events.)

We'd like to extend our special thanks to Elizabeth Gilliard, who stood down from her role as our Committee Engagement Lead during the year. Her contribution, as a founding committee member, has been substantial. We're very pleased she will continue to help us out with Engagement activity.

A number of our committee roles are currently vacant. If you're interested in finding out more about helping out with the committee, please do get in touch. The committee meets once a month, virtually, for 40 minutes.

## **Strategy & Planning**

### **Our Mission**

Friends of Rochester Esplanade and Churchfields (FoRCE) helps to protect, conserve and enhance the green space and river walks of the Esplanade and Churchfields for the good of our community and visitors.

### **Our Current Objectives and Strategy**

1. **Mature our committee and ‘back of house’ operations** – Recruiting and training committee members and expanding non-committee ‘Helpers’ to assist in smaller committee tasks.
2. **Build up ‘front of house’ activities through long term, targeted volunteering that align to our identified key themes (green, clean, social, wildlife and wellbeing)** – Focusing on three key activities (litter picks, maintenance and gardening) to build up volunteer task knowledge, efficiency and commitment and to maximise our impact, avoiding spreading ourselves too thinly.
3. **Grow and use our influence to achieve our aims** – Deepening partnerships with organisations and businesses, building awareness and impact, generating interest and insight from engagement activities, engendering support.

### **Our Vision and Plan**

We have identified many opportunities to make improvements on our patch. We have built these into our Vision, as we call it, which enables us to express confidently what we think should be happening on-site well into the future, based directly on feedback from our Members and Friends. [Take a look at our Vision](#)

There are two ways we work to get improvements done:

- directly through our volunteering activities;
- Indirectly, by influencing our partners to deliver activities.

For those activities we undertake directly we created an activity plan for the year, and have done so again for the coming year, to address our key themes (green, clean, social, wildlife and wellbeing). [View full list of activities](#)

Improvements to our back of house operations, such as the development of a new website, are put forward by committee members, discussed and agreed at committee and led by the relevant committee member.

### **Deliverables**

The above sets out what we’ve been aiming to achieve and how we have gone about it. The following sections will focus on the detail of what we have delivered this year, and give you a heads-up of what’s on the cards in the coming year.

## **Secretariat**

Committee Member: Courtney Wilson

Secretariat is the running of the committee and the mechanics of the group.

### **This year**

This year we have:

- Held monthly committee meetings, setting agendas, taking minutes and logging actions
- Improved our business continuity management
- Increased our GDPR protections
- Hosted our AGM
- Published the Annual Review
- Reviewed and updated our policies

Some of the above actions are only used or seen by the committee, but they are crucial to our long-term success as they help with the efficient running of the group, and ensure transparency, accountability and continuity.

### **Next year**

Activities identified so far for the coming year:

- Host AGM event
- Publish Annual Review
- Explore Charity status
- Integrate AI into our repeatable processes

## Treasury and Fundraising

Committee Members: Jean Skilling and Fundraising (Vacant)

Treasury is the management of resources, such as donated monies, goods and services; their budgeting, handling and accounting, and Fundraising is the cultivation of income from donors.

### **This year**

This year we have:

- Secured funds through new and renewed annual and life memberships (more detail in Membership section) and benefitted from various donations/grants/sponsorship.
- Directed most of our spending toward our projects, including the pier, purchasing plants, tools, paint etc. We have also spent some funds to promote the society and generate new volunteers.

### **Annual Accounts 2025**

		<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>
		£	£
<b><u>Income</u></b>			
<b>Donations</b>		2,112.50	7,202.53
<b>Subscriptions</b>	Annual	170.00	140.00
	Life	200.00	400.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2,482.50</b>	<b>7,742.53</b>
<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>			
<b>Expenses</b>	Plants, Compost and Equipment	1,577.00	3,541.06
	Website	124.07	124.86
	Printing, Insurance and other costs	86.69	160.84
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,787.76</b>	<b>3,826.76</b>
	Net Income/Expenditure	694.74	3,915.77
<b>Bank Balance Brought Forward</b>		5,014.69	1,098.92
<b>BANK BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD</b>		<b>5,709.43</b>	<b>5,014.69</b>

### **Next year**

Activities identified so far for the coming year:

- To improve our income from memberships we will improve our membership process for new and renewing members.
- Work closely with Ward Councillors to secure more Ward Improvement Funding, and seek other grant funding, where available.
- To further increase the resources at our disposal we will continue to engage with our partners, donors, members and volunteers, as outlined further below.

## **Partnerships**

Committee Member: Terri Zbyszewska

These relationships help us to achieve our aims. Establishing them, building mutual understanding, influencing and supporting them are all facets of these partnerships.

### **This year**

Through the course of the last year, we have:

- Established and deepened some great relationships.
- Maintained our Partnerships tracker to log and actively managed our relationships.

Below is a summary of these relationships.

Medway Council:

- Councillors
- Officers, particularly the greenspaces and piers teams
- Medway Urban Green Spaces (MUGS) Forum, connecting us with other Friends groups
- Norse, the council's contractor
- Medway Voluntary Action

Clubs, trusts and societies:

- Bridge Trust – working to restore the ornate lights
- City of Rochester Society – our Chair is on their executive board and the society have donated funds
- Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists – participation in task days
- Other Friends groups – sharing ideas and developing the new Rochester Trail
- Medway Towns Rowing Club – delivered a joint foreshore litter pick
- Police Cadets – Supporting our volunteer sessions

Local businesses:

- Rumwood Nurseries – discounting plants for our projects
- Sustainable Garden Solutions – Helping us with our hedgerow project
- The many businesses in and around Rochester who have hosted our posters and leaflets

We're hugely grateful for the support, advice and assistance provided by all. Thank you!

### **Next year**

Activities identified so far for the coming year:

- Extending our partnerships to work with more local groups and businesses
- Applying for grants to further our projects

## **Membership & Volunteers**

Committee Member: Jacques Parker

This is the recruitment and management of our most important asset – the fantastic people who kindly give us their valuable time and skills.

We recognise there are different forms of engagement:

- Friends – people who are on our mailing list but not yet members (see Communications section)
- Members – people who have signed up for Annual or Life memberships
- Volunteers – people who give their time
- Helpers – people who take on small behind the scenes tasks in support of the committee
- Committee – people who are actively involved in the running of the group

### **This year**

This year we have:

- Conducted a number of engagement activities to recruit new members, including various stalls and leaflet drops
- Recruited a number of new Committee members and Helpers, to expand our capabilities behind the scenes
- Shared time volunteered data with Medway Council

Our recruitment numbers are counted both in number of people and the total number of hours volunteered.

<b>Members</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
Member (Annual)	26	26
Member (Life)	11	14

<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>Number of unique people</b>		<b>Total hours</b>	
	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
<b>Volunteers</b>	65	90	283	356
<b>Helpers</b>	2	6	35	80
<b>Committee</b>	9	11	1150	1129

### **Next year**

Activities identified so far for the coming year:

- To grow our volunteers and members by harnessing our network, communications and events
- To fill our vacant committee roles by creating a pathway of small and specific taster activities completed by Helpers
- Expanding a number of new Helper roles, including team leaders for our activities
- Review of our approach to membership, including a review of previous years' members and mailing list members

## Communications, Marketing and Promotional Events

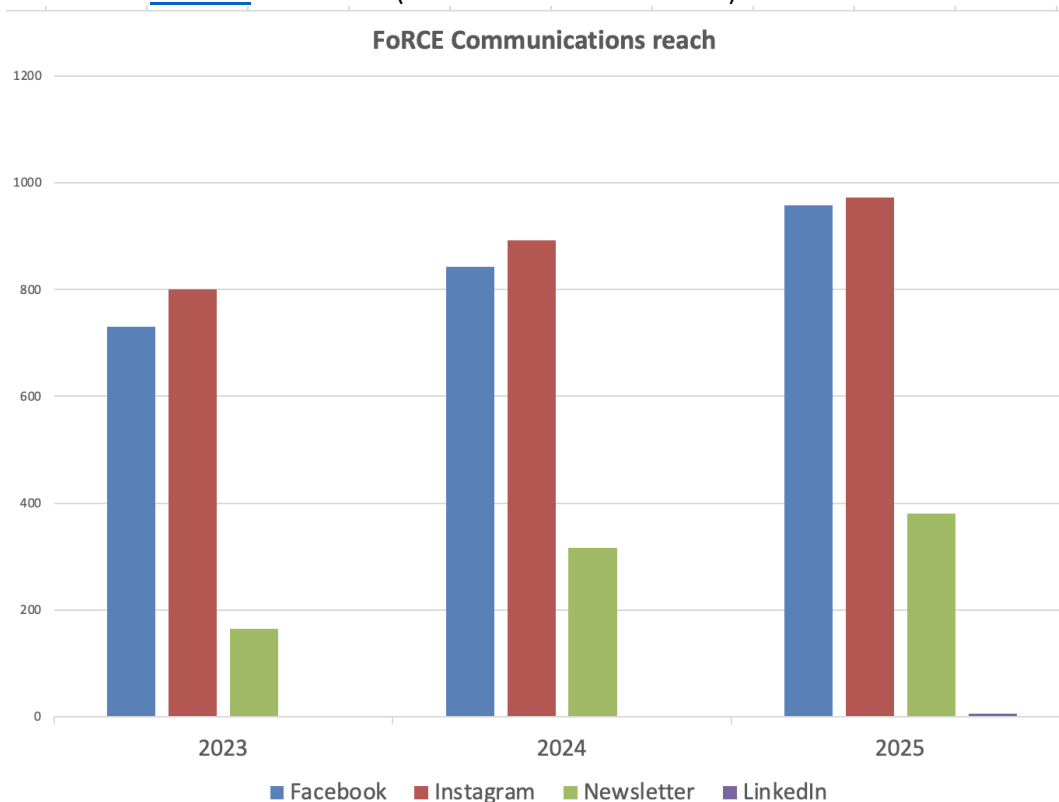
Committee Members: Natalie Poulton, Jo Summers

This is the means by which we make people aware, gather feedback and garner support and action through our broadcast media channels.

### **This year**

This year we have:

- Increased our following on a number of communication channels:
  - **Social media:**
    - Created a new Social Media Team with Helpers
    - [Instagram](#) - 973 followers (up 9%)
    - [Facebook page](#) - 958 followers (up 14%)
    - [Facebook FoRCE Volunteers Group](#) - 291 members (up 12%)
    - [LinkedIn](#) 8 followers (Launched this new channel)



- **Newsletters**
  - Members, Friends, and Volunteers newsletters: 380 subscribers (up 20% on previous year)
- **Other Channels**
  - [Website](#)
  - Posters and flyers
  - Press: compiled a list of press release contacts
  - On site noticeboard
- Using these communication channels, we have broadcast:
  - **Regular communications to update on activities and build engagement:**
    - A regular monthly newsletter to all subscribers
    - Frequent social media posts, stories, and reels
    - Features in local magazines (both in print and online)
  - **Campaigns supporting our agenda, projects and events:**

- Tackling anti-social behaviour, littering and graffiti
- Promoting volunteer events
  
- **Promotional Events:** ran a number of promotional events to raise awareness, recruit new contributors and to better understand the ideas and priorities of residents and visitors:
  - Eco Fair stall
  - Stalls in the park
  - Fancy dress at the Dickens Festival
  
- **Visual Branding:** we upgraded our logo and visual branding, and rolled this out on our website. Roll out to social channels, documents and safety clothing will continue into 2026.

### **Next year**

Activities identified so far for the coming year:

- Website: Expansion of our website
  - Socials: Expand and mature our Social Media Team
  - Promotional events: We plan to increase our number of social events and build up a team of Helpers to facilitate this
  - To increase our reach, we will continue to build our channel followers/subscriptions and send a regular patten of communications to keep them engaged on topical issues
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## Technology

Committee Member: Kristian Hansen

Technology is an enabler for what we do. Our Tech Lead creates, maintains and modernises the various platforms we use to run FoRCE, including our databases, online payment platforms, website and email. These make our back of house operations more efficient and secure, and enhance our digital proposition.

### **This Year**

Key achievements this year include:

- **Website:** We redesigned and reworked our web presence around an open-source content management system to increase its capabilities and improve back-end accessibility and operation. Work began on rebuilding the site in Autumn 2024 and it launched in early 2025 with basic functionality to provide information on our core mission and ongoing projects, and act as a point of reference for new volunteers. Since then, additional capabilities have been added including an events calendar and news section, and some cosmetic improvements were implemented in line with our 2025 visual branding upgrade.

Some key statistics from analysis of website traffic (as of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025):

- 1,800 unique visitors globally and 877 unique visitors from the UK, including:
  - 265 site visits by users in London
  - 133 site visits by users in Rochester
  - 70 site visits by users in Chatham
- 4,700 total page visits globally. Our most popular pages (with number of visits) were:
  - How To Join In (498)
  - Foreshore Litter Pick April 2025 (159)\*
  - Rochester Pier project page (110)
  - Have Your Say: The Future of the Esplanade Gardens (109)
  - Sign Up as a Friend or Member (109)

\* (high engagement for this article is likely as a result of amplification on the social media channels of local MP Lauren Edwards)

These statistics suggest that an appreciable amount of site traffic is contributing to recruiting volunteers and publicising our activities, as well as providing information on matters of community importance such as the status of Rochester Pier and the Esplanade Gardens Public Consultation

- Sources of active user website traffic other than direct access were:
    - 382 via a search engine
    - 146 via social media links
    - 51 via other websites
  - UK engagement rate was 52% (visitors viewing pages, clicking links or spending >10s on a page)
  - Average engagement time was 51 seconds
- **Databases:** We began the process of identifying our requirements for a secure and scalable databasing solution for the storage and management of member's data going forward
  - **Information Security:** It was determined that our Tech Lead would lead on matters of information security, ensuring our legal obligations regarding members' data are met

## Next Year

Looking ahead, we plan to:

- Website: Our programme of improvements will continue, with the following improvements planned:
  - Integrated approach to information about key personnel and vacant roles
  - Features section to increase traffic and engagement via social media and search engine results
  - Visitor's Guide pages for Esplanade Gardens and Churchfields
  - Press page to provide information and resources for media outlets in a single page
- Databases: We will finalise our plan for implementing a membership database with automation functionality to simplify member management and communications, and robust system security protocols, with a view to begin active development in Autumn 2026
- Information Security: We will continue to meet relevant data protection requirements and ensure all existing and future systems and practices are compliant with new UK data protection regulations expected to pass into law in 2026

2025 saw a significant leap forward in our technical capabilities, enabling us to better to promote our activities, recruit Friends and Members, manage our membership effectively and keep our data secure; we expect 2026 to see an even greater progression in the ways we harness technology to further our mission.

## Projects, Programmes & Social Events

Committee Members: Aileen Smith, Kristian Hansen, Horticulture Lead (Vacant), Jo Summers

These are the 'front of house' activities we undertake to achieve our aims. In line with our strategy, they seek to support our key themes: green, clean, social, wildlife and wellbeing. In other words, when we're doing something that hits at least one of these themes, we know we're on track to achieving our aims.

- **Green:** Our horticulture projects add biodiversity and make our green spaces an enjoyable place to be, such as through the planting of and care for our hedgerows and Sensory Garden.
- **Clean:** We help to restore our infrastructure through our maintenance activities and remove litter by picking on land and along the foreshore. We also tackle graffiti and vandalism. These activities reduce the likelihood of future issues and make our environment more sustainable, safe and enjoyable.
- **Social:** All of our volunteer activities are social. We have created a vibrant community of like-minded people through doing what we do. We also have occasional, specific social activities, which we plan to extend.
- **Wildlife:** Our Green projects create new habitats and food sources, meaning we have increasing variety and quantity of fauna. Our Clean projects, in particular litter picking, help to protect habitats, removing contaminants. We're currently recruiting for a Wildlife Helper to do even more specifically for fauna.
- **Wellbeing:** Physical and emotional wellbeing of our community is important to us. The spaces we create and maintain help our wider community by creating spaces for them to relax, exercise and socialise in. In the process, our volunteers get exercise, interaction, and a sense of community, agency and accomplishment.

As our themes overlap and are too broad for one person to deliver them all, we organise ourselves in a more practical way, aligned to our projects, with committee portfolios focussed on: Maintenance, River, Horticulture, and Events.

### **This year**

Activities undertaken this year and in flight for next year:

#### **Maintenance**

- Litter picks – Regular litter picks collecting countless bags of litter
- Painting and restoration – restoring our bike racks and Churchfields railings (underway)
- Graffiti and vandalism – We have a dedicated Helper (Bruce) who regularly walks the site and photographs and reports incidents of graffiti/vandalism. (NB: Please don't let this replace you reporting incidents – if you see something, please still report it as soon as possible.)

#### **River**

- Foreshore litter picks – A regular event for us, currently running half-yearly by the Esplanade Gardens and Rowing Club
- Rochester pier – We have succeeded in influencing the council to review the structure following its reclosure to hopefully reallow us access. Before it was closed, we managed to prep/paint the railings and roof

#### **Horticulture**

- Hedgerow project – We've planted our first stretch of hedgerow – approximately 50 metres / 300 plants
- Sensory Garden – Regular gardening sessions to maintain the beds
- Bulbs – Continuing to plant a variety of bulbs across the site
- Trees – mapped our tree population, including their health, so to aid better management of it

#### **Social events**

- Post AGM social – This has been the sum total of our Social Events this year, but we plan to do more in this field

### **Next year**

As well as all of the activities already in flight above, projects identified so far for the coming year include:

- Maintenance plan – we're formalising our maintenance with a prioritised plan
  - Painting and restoration – we'll complete the Churchfields railings and then move onto bollards and benches
  - Foreshore litter picks – we plan to increase these from two to three
  - Hedgerows – we plan to plant more hedgerows to prevent antisocial behaviour, screen unsightly views and to create animal habitats and food sources
  - Tree planting – We'd like to plant more trees this coming year. We hope to recruit a Helper to survey the site and come up with a tree planting plan
  - Social Events – we've planned a number of new social activities for 2026
-

## **Looking forward**

This year has been the continuation of our realising our ambition – making a difference to our community and environment.

Our objectives for the next year in support of our mission will be to:

- further our long-term vision
- finesse committee operations and enhance our technology
- grow our resources
- build new and deeper partnerships
- increase our volunteer base and expand the opportunities for them to get involved
- extend the reach of communications and marketing
- deliver activities/projects/events that meet identified local needs and aligned with our themes

Scheduled events and activities will be announced in our communications and appear on our website's [volunteer activities](#) page.

Thank you for taking the time to read our Annual Report. We hope you've found us *a FoRCE for good*.

## **Contact us**

To find out more about FoRCE, you can visit our website or get in touch with us via email.

Website: [www.esplanadefriends.org.uk](http://www.esplanadefriends.org.uk)

Email: [contact@esplanadefriends.org.uk](mailto:contact@esplanadefriends.org.uk)

