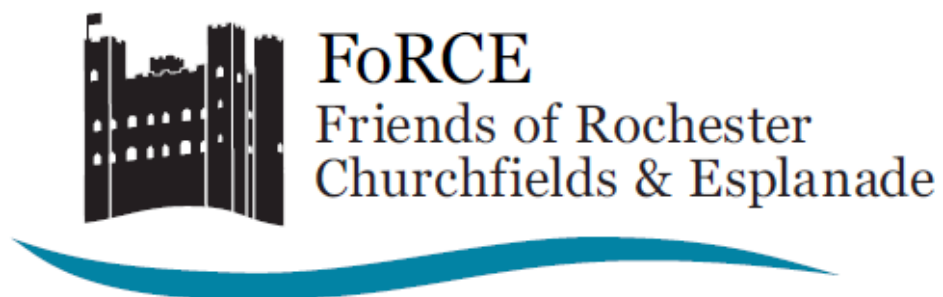


FoRCE 2024 Annual Review



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Foreword

We have now completed our fifth 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

Structure & Governance

AGM

We held our third Annual General Meeting in Autumn of 2024 where we (re)lected a committee. The next AGM will be held in autumn next year.

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; Engagement, Membership & Volunteers
- Delivery: Projects & Programmes; Events; Comms & Marketing, Tech, River

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 – vacant
- Treasurer – Jean Skilling
- Fundraising – vacant
- Partnerships – Terri Zbyszewska
- Engagement – Elizabeth Gilliard
- Membership & Volunteers – Jacques Parker (formerly Aileen Smith)
- Projects & Programmes – vacant
- Events - vacant
- Comms & Marketing – Natalie Poulton
- Tech – Kristian Hansen
- River – Kristian Hansen
- Without portfolio – Aileen Smith
- Without portfolio – Will Kingsland

We'd like to extend our special thanks to Stuart Ferris and Corry Smit, who both stood down from their respective roles as Treasurer and Site Monitor during the year. Their contributions have been substantial.

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, pier restoration and the sensory garden) to build up volunteer task knowledge, efficiency and commitment and to maximise our impact, avoiding spreading ourselves too thinly. Preparing for our next projects – hedgerows and tree planting.
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 Plan

We have identified many opportunities to make improvements on our patch. We have built these into our long-term plan, our Grand Plan 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.

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).

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

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.
- Hosted our AGM.
- Published the Annual Review.

Some of these things we do 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.

Treasury

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

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 grants/sponsorship.
- Directed most of our spending toward our projects, such as plants and tools for the sensory garden and paint for the pier, though we have also spent some funds to promote the society and generate new volunteers.
- Secured a new trade plant supplier to reduce costs.

Annual Accounts 2024

		2024	2023
		£	£
<u>Income</u>			
Donations		7202.53	1528.00
Subscriptions	Annual	140.00	
	Life	400.00	200.00
TOTAL		7742.53	1,728.00
<u>Expenditure</u>			
Expenses	Plants, Compost and Equipment	3541.06	2546.59
	Website	124.86	84.00
	Printing, Insurance and other costs	160.84	290.38
TOTAL		3826.76	2920.97
	Net Income/Expenditure to date	3915.77	(1192.97)
Bank Balance Brought Forward		1098.92	2291.89
BANK BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD		5014.69	1098.92

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

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

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
- Rochester City Centre Forum – offered a free stall at the artisan market
- Medway Towns Rowing Club – delivered a joint foreshore litter pick

Local businesses:

- Rumwood Nurseries – discounting plants for our projects
- Ebbsfleet Printing Solutions – discounted printing for the Sensory Garden signage

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.

Membership & Volunteers

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:

- Onboarded a new Membership Committee member.
- Conducted a number of engagement activities to recruit new members, including a stall at the artisan market and several leaflet drops on the high street.
- Shared time volunteered data with Medway Council.

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

Members	2023	2024
Member (Annual)	22	26
Member (Life)	8	11

Volunteers	Number of people		Total hours	
	2023	2024	2023	2024
Volunteers	60	65	575	610
Helpers	2	2	35	35
Committee	8	9	900	1150

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'.
- Review of our approach to membership.

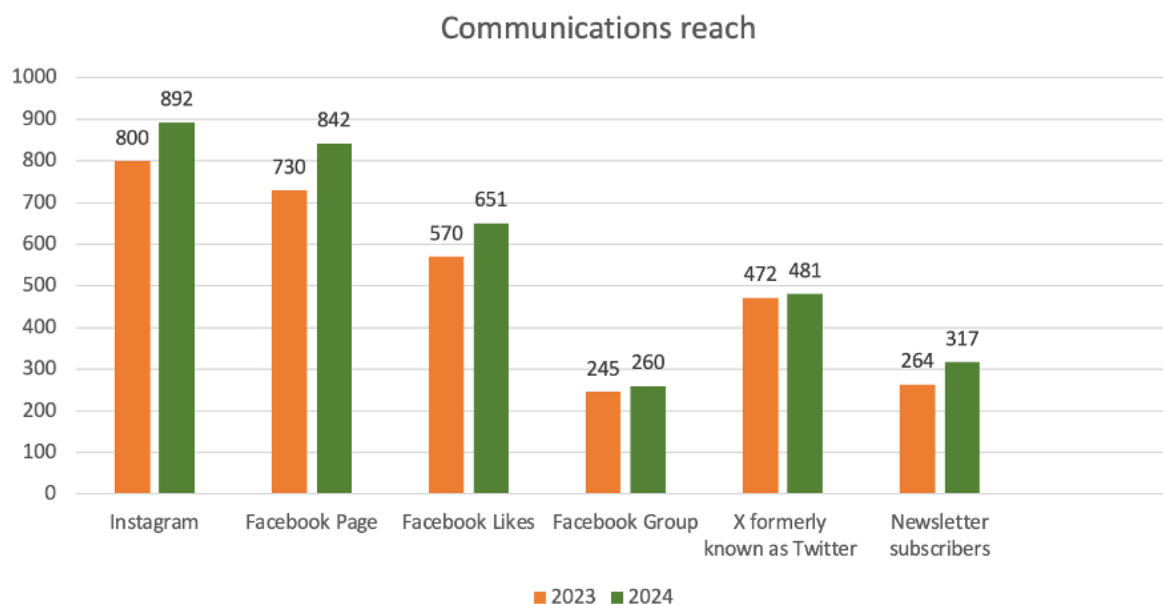
Communications & Marketing

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:
 - [Instagram](#) (892 followers, up 12%)
 - [Facebook page](#) (651 likes, up 14%, and 842 followers, up 15%)
 - [Facebook FoRCE Volunteers Group](#) (260 members, up 6%)
 - [X formerly known as Twitter](#) (481 followers, up 2%)
 - Newsletters:
 - Members, Friends, and Volunteers: (317 subscribers, up 20% on previous year)
 - [Website](#)
 - Posters and flyers
 - Press: Compiled a list of contacts for press releases
 - On-site noticeboard



- Using these communication channels, we have broadcast:
 - Regular comms to update on activities and build engagement:
 - A regular monthly newsletter to all subscribers
 - Social media posts
 - Campaigns in support of our agenda, projects and events:
 - Tackling anti-social behaviour, littering and graffiti
 - Promoting our volunteer events

Next year

Activities identified so far for the coming year:

- Relaunch of our website with increased interactivity.
- To increase our reach, we will continue to build our channel followers/subscriptions and send a regular patter of communications to keep them engaged on topical issues.

Technology

Technology is an enabler for what we do. Our Tech function 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.

Following Stuart's stepping back from committee roles in 2023, Kristian took on the management of FoRCE's IT infrastructure and web presence.

This Year

Key achievements this year include:

- **Website:** Redesigning and reworking the website to use an open-source content management system. Significant progress began in early 2024, and the project is on track to meet its completion deadline of 31st January 2025. With this more easily accessible publishing platform comes opportunities for streamlining many of our workflows and interactions, and this has been built into the design of the website. These include channelling social media interactions, membership applications and publicity updates via the site.
- **Databases:** We have scoped out a concept to centralise our membership and partnerships databases ahead of development and roll-out.

Next Year

Looking ahead, we plan to:

- **Website:** We will launch the new website in January 2025 and test core functionality. Numerous additions to the website are also planned, including features such as an interactive events calendar and volunteer session coordination tools and functionality to use it as a hub for connecting members with volunteering opportunities and key updates.
- **Databases:** We have a clear plan established for 2025. After the launch of the website, we will implement improvements to the membership and partnerships databases to streamline data management and engagement tracking.
- Explore further technological advancements to enhance operations while maintaining accessibility and user-friendliness.

This year's efforts have laid a strong foundation for improving our digital capabilities, ensuring we can better serve our community and support our mission.

Projects, Programmes & Events

These are the 'front of house' activities we undertake to achieve our aims. (Indicated in brackets are the primary theme the activity supports: green, clean, social, wildlife and wellbeing.)

This year

Activities undertaken this year and in flight for next year:

- Litter picks (clean) – Regular litter picks collecting countless bags of litter.
- Foreshore Litter picks (clean) – A regular event for us, currently running half-yearly.
- Sensory Garden (green & wildlife) – Regular gardening sessions, all beds have been completed and now need maintenance.
- Bulb planting (green & wildlife) – Continuing to plant a variety of bulbs across the site.
- Tree survey (green) – we have this year mapped our tree population, including their health, so to aid better management of it. We hope to recruit a Helper to conduct these for us.
- Rochester pier (social & clean) – We have succeeded in influencing the council to review the structure, allow us access, cleaned the structure and started painting it. (See more further below.)
- Graffiti (clean) – We now have a new dedicated Helper (Bruce) who regularly walks the site and photographs and reports incidents of graffiti/vandalism. (NB: Please don't let this replace others reporting incidents – if you see something, please still report it.)
- Artisan Market (social) – to raise awareness, recruit new contributors and to better understand the ideas and priorities of residents and visitors.
- Lights (clean) – We're working with Rochester Bridge Trust who are restoring the dilapidated ornate lights at the entrance of the Esplanade Park.
- Balustrade and coping stones (clean) – We have for some time been encouraging the council to repair these items and work on both have been undertaken this year. There is more to do with the balustrade, but it has been partially repaired and made safe.

Next year

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

- Hedgerows and tree planting (green, clean & wildlife) – our next gardening project will be to plant new hedgerows to prevent antisocial behaviour and to create animal habitats and food sources.

River

Our patch includes a significant stretch of water and a pier, so we have a dedicated 'River' portfolio lead, Kristian.

This Year

2024 was a big year for FoRCE's efforts to maintain, improve and restore those areas of the River Medway located in our patch. Key developments include:

- **Rochester Pier:** After years of closure due to safety concerns, Rochester Pier reopened to the public in July 2024. This milestone followed two years of collaboration with Medway Council, during which the broken brow section was removed, and the fixed pier structure underwent a thorough structural assessment. Here's what we did:
 - Created our '*Vision for Rochester Pier*' proposal that outlined our plans for restoration, potential improvements, and commercial opportunities to support long-term maintenance.
 - Engaged with Medway Council representatives Adam Taylor and Cllr Simon Curry, led by Terry and Kristian. This was instrumental in securing the structural assessment, repairs to locks, handing over of the keys, reopening, new lifesaving equipment, access to on-site electricity and repairs to the lighting.
 - Conducted volunteer sessions focused on cleaning and restoring the pier. This included structural rejuvenation led by Aileen and Martyn Smith, and painting and replanting of the planters, led by Terry, Kristian and Anna Midgely.
 - Secured initial funding from several sources, with assistance from Carmen Juravle.

These efforts have laid the groundwork for further enhancements in 2025.

- **Foreshore Litter Picks:** Litter-picking sessions were conducted along the river foreshore, one in partnership with the Medway Towns Rowing Club. These clean-ups resulted in substantial waste being removed, improving the environment for both wildlife and the community.

Next Year

Looking ahead, FoRCE will continue to build on the progress made in 2024 with plans to:

- Pursue additional funding and implement the next phases of the Vision for Rochester Pier proposal, including seating, storage, planting, and lighting, amongst other things.
- Continue volunteer-led restoration sessions to improve the pier's usability and aesthetic appeal.
- Collaborate with Medway Council to address issues of vandalism and unauthorised access; on-site water; and the realisation of our plan to commercialise the pier.
- Conduct further foreshore litter picks.

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 Grand Plan
- finesse committee operations
- 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
- deliver activities/projects that meet identified local needs and aligned with our themes

Scheduled events will be announced in our communications and appear on our [events calendar](#).

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

Email: contact@esplanadefriends.org.uk

