

FoRCE AGM Minutes

Tuesday 15th September 2026
at the Rochester Community Hub

1. Introduction

- The meeting was opened by Kristian Hansen (Vice Chair), deputising for Terry Clennel (Chair) who was unable to attend.
- Committee Members introduced themselves and their roles within the organisation:
 - Secretary – Courtney Wilson
 - Treasurer – Nia Rowlands
 - Partnerships – Terri Zbyszewska
 - Membership & Volunteers – Jacques Parker
 - Events – Joanne Summers
 - Maintenance – Aileen Smith
- An introduction was also extended to other attendees, namely John, David, Jennifer and Alex.

2. Approval of last year's AGM minutes

- The minutes from the 2025 AGM were made available on the FoRCE website and were reviewed by attendees.
- There were no objections to the minutes, and they were formally approved.

3. Committee Updates:

3.1 TREASURER'S REPORT

- Bank balance at year end 2025 was £5,709
- Year to date income is approximately £1,700 from donations, of which £1,500 from Medway Council and £200 from membership fees and other donations.
- Expenditure to date is £536, including annual volunteer insurance and equipment (secateurs, bird boxes, leaf blowers, wire for securing bird boxes).
- Annual accounts 2025 achieved their main target: working with the woodland trust on hedgerow planting.
- Total balance at the date of the AGM was £6,873
- Note: Funds designated for pier improvements are ring-fenced and awaiting access to the pier for deployment.

3.2 MEMBERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERS

- Year to date (2026) sees 17 annual members with repeat membership expected in the remaining months of the year, and 14 lifetime members in total.
- Membership is the lifeline of FoRCE; the organisation has experienced excellent growth in session turnout over the last year.
- Volunteer attendance has reached capacity at sessions, so much so that additional tools have been purchased due to high demand.
- There has been strong intergenerational participation, including young volunteers aged 14-18 supported by Medway Police Cadets.
- Volunteer hours have increased annually; volunteers are the foundation of the organisation's work.
 - i. Volunteer hours total at 1037 for the year as of 01/09/26, with 598 of those being active hours from sessions from 299 volunteers so far.

- ii. Volunteer hours for 2025 totalled in at 1841, 712 of which were Activity hours at volunteer sessions across 356 volunteers.
- It is important to note that not all volunteers are members, and our aim is to try and encourage that conversion moving forward.
- There is currently a technology initiative underway to streamline the membership application and renewal processes.

3.3 COMMUNICATIONS

- Natalie Poulton (former Comms Lead and Vice Chair) has stepped away from her roles while receiving treatment.
- Committee has agreed to keep the Communications Lead seat warm for Natalie for one year.
- Comms responsibilities shared among Kristian, Terry, Jacques, and Natalia.
- Emily Ferris has joined as a “Comms Deputy” to assist in Natalie’s absence for the coming year.
- No replacement Communications Lead will be sought at this time

3.4 TECHNOLOGY

- A 6-month pilot project was approved by the committee to design and build an integrated member management system.
- The new system will streamline membership applications, renewals, and ensure data compliance with UK legislation.
- Kristian is serving as FoRCE's Information Security Officer.
- Proposal to make this his winter project (2026/27) to complete system development for launch in 2027.

4. Elections

All existing committee members were unopposed and were re-elected. The election was officiated by council member, Alex Patterson.

- Chair / Horticulture – Terry Clennel
- Vice Chair / Tech Lead / River Lead – Kristian Hansen
- Communications – Natalie Poulton
- Secretary – Courtney Wilson
- Treasurer – Nia Rowlands
- Partnerships – Terri Zbyszewska
- Membership & Volunteers – Jacques Parker
- Events – Joanne Summers
- Maintenance – Aileen Smith
- Without Portfolio – Will Kingsland

5. Reflections on the year gone – An overview of FoRCE’s work and activities.

5.1 SENSORY GARDEN

- Continues to thrive and is maintained in good condition. Survived the dry summer conditions better than expected without emergency irrigation.

5.2 CHURCHFIELD BANK

- Major focus area led by Will; volunteers clearing bank alongside path and preparing for railing repainting

- Hedgerow planting carried out this year; phase 2 planting planned for November with plants from Tree Council and Woodland Trust. Hedgerow has survived the harsh summer well.

5.3 BIRD BOXES AND INSECT HOTELS

- Installation planned following consultation with Green Spaces team on proper attachment methods respecting conservation area requirements.

5.4 LITTER PICKING

- Popular regular activity with strong volunteer turnout.
- Foreshore sessions provide opportunity to access areas beyond seawall at appropriate tides
- Photo archive maintained of notable finds.

5.5 MAINTENANCE

- Aileen and Will lead maintenance team, with the main focus being on painting and general revitalisation of structures and equipment.

5.6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

- Networking and lobbying with council and stakeholders to maintain Esplanade Gardens' prominence.
- Involved in playground renovation consultation (launching 2027).
- Hosted MUGS forum with MP Lauren Edwards on site visit.
- Significant boost from MP Lauren Edwards' letter endorsing FoRCE to residents along the Esplanade; directly contributed to volunteer and membership recruitment.

6. Looking Forward

- Hedgerow Phase 2 planting (November 2026).
- Continued painting and maintenance projects.
- Strengthening digital presence through newsletter, website, and social media.
- Website expansion focusing on community history content.

Challenges and Ongoing Issues

6.1 ROCHESTER PIER

- Remains closed. The pontoon connection (brow) was condemned and removed; pier now requires further structural work.
- FoRCE successfully reopened the pier temporarily; undertook volunteer-led aesthetic maintenance and painting.
- In ongoing conversation with Adam Taylor (council). No timeline confirmed but early indications promising; expect update within 6 months.
- Proposed implementation of educational interpretation signage detailing local history and heritage.

6.2 BALUSTRADE

- The balustrade running along the barrier between Esplanade Gardens and Esplanade has been in temporary repair since June 2023. FoRCE seeking to work with Bridge Trust to improve this.

6.3 TREE MAINTENANCE AND PERMISSIONS

- Council has paused all tree maintenance in the conservation area pending clarity on permissions.
- FoRCE has proposed a plan to address dead/diseased wood, basal growth, canopy raising, and ivy control.
- Working with Emma and Fiona (Green Spaces team) to develop a way forward.
- Sarah Coles designated as dedicated tree volunteer to monitor tree health.

6.4 PATH MAINTENANCE

- Paths becoming increasingly overgrown; council and NORSE unable to maintain them.
- FoRCE volunteers have undertaken path clearance work on unofficial basis with remarkable results.
- Decision pending on whether this becomes permanent FoRCE responsibility.

6.5 MOWING SCHEDULE

- Council has moved to 3-month grass mowing schedule. FoRCE supports this in appropriate areas but seeks discussion about more frequent mowing in designated areas to facilitate recreational activities.

6.6 WATER TAP AND FACILITIES

- Esplanade Gardens water tap disconnected during COVID and not reinstated; council cites it as unsustainable.
- FoRCE seeking clarification on reasons and reinstatement costs.
- Alternative: water supply to pier could potentially be accessed.

6.7 BINS AND COLLECTIONS

- Recent collection frequency changes resulting in overflowing bins due to new contractor arrangements.

6.8 CRUISING CLUB EXPANSION

- Cruising Club exploring acquisition of freehold on clubhouse within Esplanade Gardens. FoRCE in conversation with club; understand access will not be impeded.

6.9 SHORTS BROTHERS HERITAGE AVIATION GROUP

- Proposed flying boat statue for Esplanade Gardens (pending planning approval).
- FoRCE in support of this.

7. Recruitment

- FoRCE is actively seeking volunteers and members. Key vacancy: Fundraising Lead (to join committee). Interested parties are encouraged to contact Terry or Kristian directly, or visit www.esplanadefriends.org.uk

8. Questions and other business

- John asked about membership numbers and volunteer contributions. Clarification provided that FoRCE maintains both annual members (£5/year) and life members (£100).
- Most active volunteers are registered as 'friends' rather than paid members. Future reporting will include volunteer hour documentation alongside membership figures to better reflect the scale of community involvement.

- David would like to have more trees planted. A point that will be addressed again with the Green Spaces team.
- Opportunities for wider community engagement with neighbouring riverside organisations and clubs. Alex Patterson hopes to encourage a “clone” of FoRCE in other parts of Medway to help build the same sense of community in those areas.
- River funding to improve river status and accessibility.

9. Close

The meeting was closed with thanks to all attendees, volunteers, committee members, and supporters for their ongoing contributions to FoRCE's work. Special thanks to Alex for officiating the elections and to all participants for their valuable feedback.