

Trustees' Annual Report April 2023 to March 2024

Reference and Administration Details

Charity Name: Rimrose Valley Friends

Registered Charity number: 1171536

Registered addresses:

32 Henley Ave

Litherland

LIVERPOOL

L21 2PU

The Charity's current Trustees are:

Simon Albert

Tracey Boileau

Sarah Edey

Linda Gaskell

Gary Young

Structure, Governance and Management

1. The Charity is governed by a written constitution
2. During this period, each of the charity's previous 4 trustees above retired and were reappointed at the last AGM, in line with the charity's constitution.
3. RVF member, Simon Albert, put himself forward as a trustee at the AGM in this period, which was confirmed by those present
4. The Charity has a paid membership scheme, with all members having voting rights at the AGM and other general meetings.
5. The last AGM was held on Wednesday, 26th April 2023, with the next to take place within the 15-month period permitted by the constitution.

This Annual Report covers the period from April 2023 to March 2024 in line with the Charity's accounts covering the same period.

Objectives and Activities

Objectives:

1. Rimrose Valley Friends sets out to promote, protect and improve the community resource that is Rimrose Valley Country Park.
2. Rimrose Valley Friends aims to benefit the local community surrounding Rimrose Valley, promoting it through events and activities, engaging with other community groups and liaising with the police to cut down on anti-social behaviour.
3. Rimrose Valley Friends' work covers the area of Rimrose Valley Country Park, bordering the Leeds-Liverpool canal and the adjoining communities of Seaforth, Litherland, Waterloo, Crosby, Thornton and Netherton.

Activities:

The Charity's trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit and have undertaken the following activities within the boundaries of that guidance.

During this period, the Charity has aimed to further the core activities of Rimrose Valley Friends and simultaneously run a successful campaign against a road proposal which threatens the park's future, which is known as Save Rimrose Valley. As these have different objectives, the activities for each are summarised separately below.

Rimrose Valley Friends

The Charity's core activities include:

1. Raising awareness and promoting the Charity's work **online** via the following:
 - Writing articles, blogs and content added to dedicated website www.rimrosevalleyfriends.org
 - Administering the campaign's Facebook group "Rimrose Valley Friends"
 - Maintaining the campaign's Twitter account @RimroseValley
2. Raising awareness and promoting the Charity's work **in the community** via the following:
 - Organising activities and events on Rimrose Valley
 - Engaging with local schools, community groups and other charities with shared objectives
 - Attending and supporting local community events
3. Engaging with relevant **stakeholders** including:
 - Local Councillors
 - Green Sefton
 - Sefton CVS
 - Local MPs

Specific activities in this period

The following is a summary of the key activities in this period:

1. **Facebook** The charity's community group has remained an active and positive forum to thousands of members predominantly from the surrounding communities. At the time of preparing this report, membership of the group stands at around 8,800. The group is used for people to share relevant news stories, photographs and information and is administered by volunteers.
2. **Website** The mailing list has continued to grow. Members of the public can subscribe to this list and receive email notifications of news and events added to the website. The charity has plans to develop a brand-new membership programme to replace the existing 'WebCollect' platform, specific to RVF, which will be housed on the website. See membership update below.
3. **Twitter/X** This has proven to be a great way of connecting with similar local community groups and supporting each other's work. Again, the account is administered by volunteers. At the time of preparing this report, the charity has 1,764 followers. We are less active on this platform as we have found that majority of our supporters use Facebook to engage on Rimrose Valley matters
4. **Eventbrite** After securing funding to deliver more events and activities in this period, the charity increased its use of the Eventbrite platform to administer these. This helps track bookings and communicate with participants more effectively than social media alone. At the time of preparing this report, the charity has 159 followers on this platform, from just over 30 in the previous period.
5. **Paid role** This period proved to be one of the busiest in the charity's short history with funding secured to deliver events and activities (see below). As a result, the charity took the decision to fund a part-time role to apply for funding and deliver these events. This was a huge success with 4 out of 5 funding applications being successful and a constant flow of activities and events for the public to engage in. At the time of preparing this report, the role has ceased temporarily, and the charity is considering how to make this self-sustaining.
6. **Guided Walks** We arranged 4 guided walks during this period; a foraging walk in May; a nature walk led by Green Sefton in June; a bird-spotting walk led by our local RSPB officer, also in June. We worked with Green Sefton to arrange another bat walk in September. These walks are incredibly popular, and all were free to take part in.
7. **Living Well Sefton – Relax on Rimrose** During this period we secured funding from Living Well Sefton to deliver a series of free events promoting physical and mental health on Rimrose Valley itself. The project was named "Relax on Rimrose" and events included the following:
 - i. Yoga (adult and child sessions)
 - ii. Tai Chi
 - iii. Guided Foraging Walks
 - iv. Art & Relaxation classes
 - v. Forest School (adult sessions)

These activities were incredibly well received and ran throughout the calendar year. RVF were represented at each session and captured the necessary feedback for the funder. As is common with many other local groups offering free events, we noticed a number of 'no shows'. We fed back to our supporters that because an activity is free doesn't mean there is no cost to providing it. We will continue to communicate this for future events

8. **Mind - Time to Talk Day** During this period we secured funding from mental health charity, Mind, to deliver a day of free activities on the specific date of 1st February 2024. Activities were organised by RVF volunteers, based at a local church, and included the following

- i. A mindfulness walk on Rimrose Valley
- ii. Group cooking sessions
- iii. Rock painting
- iv. A cooking demonstration
- v. Health checks, including weight, BMI and blood pressure
- vi. Mindfulness talks and poetry

Refreshments were provided, travel expenses were covered and each participant had a choice of book to take home, on either mindfulness techniques or simple, healthy cooking on a budget

9. **Breathe Better Air Fund – Let’s put the Brakes on Pollution** During this period we secured funding from Community Foundation for Merseyside’s Breathe Better Air Fund. The purpose of this fund is to raise awareness of air pollution and encourage individuals to take steps to improve it. As this was predominantly a publicity campaign, many of the activities took a significant amount of planning and were delivered in the 2024-25 and will therefore appear in the next annual report. The following activities took place in this period:

- i. Funding provided for 2 x Dr Bike sessions on Rimrose valley in January and February. Members of the public could turn up and have their bike repaired or maintained. Merseyside police also attended and carried out security marking. These events were both extremely popular with 100+ bikes worked on across the events
- ii. Flyers and posters were shared with schools in the vicinity, encouraging behavioural change in travel to and from school

10. **Tesco Stronger Starts – Explore & Learn on Rimrose Valley** Towards the end of this period we secured funding from Tesco’s Stronger Starts programme, which focusses on delivering activities based on learning in the community. Delivery of these activities will commence in 2024-25 and will therefore appear in the next annual report.

11. **Wildflower meadow** Once again, the Charity sold seeds harvested from the previous year’s meadow to raise the funds for subsequent sowing and to generate income for the Charity. In spring/summer 2023, neither meadow required the intervention of herbicide. However, upon notifying the public of upcoming works in March 2024, concerns were again expressed around the herbicide, glyphosate, to prepare the ground. As a result, trustees arranged a meeting with Richard Scott from Scouse Flowerhouse. He advised that he has studied the research around glyphosate and is comfortable with its use, which is necessary to give ‘annual’ varieties of wildflower the best chance of success. A decision was taken to transition away from annuals to perennials, which do not require the annual intervention of herbicide. This is in line with the charity’s objectives of championing the environment and the health and wellbeing of the surrounding communities. This meant that 2024 will be the final year the RVF meadow at the centre of Chaffers running track will be sprayed.

12. **Rimrose Valley Calendar** The Charity again invited people to submit photographs for the 2024 calendar. The Charity reverted to ordering 500 copies to avoid the excess stock from the previous year. This meant a healthy profit from the sales, Leftover copies were given to local individuals, community groups and businesses who support the Charity’s work.

13. **Marsh Lane Harriers & Chaffers Running Track** MLH’s plans to construct a club house next to Chaffers’ running track was approved by Sefton Council’s planning department during this period. At the time of preparing this report, this work has yet to

commence. In April 2023, MLH approached RVF asking if the charity would consider relocating the wildflower meadow to a smaller site near to the track, as they wished to develop the field into a sporting facility – including football pitches and an athletics field. MLH hold the lease for this land, and it sits within a recreational zone of the park, according to Sefton Council’s management plan. In theory, this means they can do this, subject to approval from Sefton Council and Green Sefton. The trustees met to consider this request. Although we support all the work MLH has done in reinstating the track and promoting health and wellbeing, given that the project was funded by both members of the public and environmental grants, which included leaving a legacy of a habitat, and has been maintained at a cost for 4+ years, it was felt that the meadow should remain in its current location. It also creates a unique setting for runners to exercise. We fed this back and recommended that, if MLH wanted to revisit the idea in the future, any plans should go out to the local community for consideration and feedback. MLH accepted this decision. However, we expect this topic to come up again in the future, based on the ongoing success of their running club and popularity of the track.

14. **Former trustee, Hazel Davies.** The charity funded an oak bench in memory of Hazel, which was installed on the park in the summer of 2023.

Save Rimrose Valley

The Charity continues to oppose National Highways' plans to build a dual carriageway through Rimrose Valley Country Park, known as The A5036 Port of Liverpool Access Scheme.

The Charity set up a Road Action Group in September 2017. The group comprises the four trustees and additional volunteers from the community, with approximately 20 active members.

The campaign's work is coordinated by Stuart Bennett on a paid contractor basis. The role is paid for via a combination of funding from grants and general Charity fundraising. During this period, the trustees decided they wished this to become a paid role (PAYE) to offer greater job security and a pension. At the time of writing this report, the trustees are working with Sefton CVS to get this in place for the following period 2024-25.

Guidance and support are received from relevant environmental groups and NGOs including Transport Action Network, Friends of the Earth, CPRE and Lancashire Wildlife Trust.

This guidance informs the campaign's strategy which has two key objectives:

1. To change minds of decision-makers at Westminster
2. To engage the community in the fight to save the park

The campaign's work should therefore fulfil either of the two objectives, with the Road Action Group supporting the delivery of this work.

The campaign's core activities include:

1. Raising awareness and promoting the campaign's work **online** via the following:
 - Writing articles, blogs and content added to dedicated website www.saverimrosevalley.org
 - Writing and distributing press releases to local, regional and national media outlets
 - Maintaining the campaign's Facebook page @saverimrosevalley
 - Maintaining the campaign's Twitter account @saverimrose
 - Maintaining the campaign's Instagram account @saverimrose
 - Producing a podcast series "We Said No" covering many of the issues around the campaign
 - Creating videos to convey key messages
2. Raising awareness and promoting the campaign's work **in the community** via the following:
 - Organising demonstrations
 - Leafleting
 - Using signs, posters and banners in prominent locations

- Engaging with local schools
 - Promoting the campaign at 'in store' events such as LUSH and local supermarkets
 - Engaging with other environmental groups and campaigns from across the Liverpool City Region
 - Attending and supporting local community events
3. Engaging with key stakeholders in the road proposal including:
 - National Highways
 - Peel Ports
 - Department for Transport
 - Transport for the North
 - Local MPs, Councillors, the Metro Mayor & Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
 4. Documenting key arguments against the road proposal
 5. Exploring and promoting viable alternatives the road proposal

Specific activities in this period

1. **Social media** The campaign continued to grow its following across all platforms during this period and it continues to be a vital and dynamic way of communicating key issues. At the time of preparing this report, the campaign has >4,200 followers of the Facebook (an increase of 700 since last year) page, 2,236 on Twitter/X (an increase of 36 since last year). The campaign previously had >1,000 followers on Instagram but the account was hacked. It was subsequently retrieved and, at the time of writing, is back up towards 592 followers (an increase of 192 since last year). 2-factor authentication was then added to all social media accounts. Analytics show that many tweets and posts have been viewed thousands of times.
2. **Website** The campaign-specific website was updated consistently throughout this period with press coverage secured, blogs and longer articles covering the more detailed topics linked to the campaign. Website visits continue to be encouraging. As with social media, website analytics show that many articles have been viewed thousands of times.
3. **National Highways** The project was formally moved to RIS3 last year, which picks up again in 2025. The last formal update posted to its project page was in July 2022 and its last formal newsletter in October 2019. No consultations or public information events have taken place in this period. At the time of writing this report, we are attempting to have sight of the latest traffic flow analysis which we know was completed by NH's contractor in autumn of last year.
4. **Alternative Solutions** The campaign continued to chase Sefton Council and the Liverpool City Region on follow up work to 2020's ARUP report and for greater clarification around the role of PASG (Port Access Steering Group) where such topics are discussed and progressed. We continued to push for cross-community representation on PASG, with continued resistance and no genuine desire to engage forthcoming. We secured funding from LUSH to create a website promoting the alternatives we're aware of, which will be going live in the following period (2024/25).
5. **Politics** The campaign maintained good relations with Councillors, the relevant Council Officers and MPs; all of whom oppose the road proposal. Major developments as follows:

- a. In efforts to secure the Shadow Transport team's support, we **attended the Labour Party Conference** in October 2023 which was in Liverpool and spoke with Shadow Transport Secretary, Louise Haigh, and other shadow ministers on the subject of the road proposal and port access.
 - b. In February 2024, we attended the **Northern Transport Summit** in Liverpool which again proved to be a good networking opportunity and an opportunity to raise and discuss the Port of Liverpool Access Scheme in a high-profile forum.
 - c. In March 2024, we attended **Transport for the North's conference** in Newcastle which proved to be a good networking opportunity and an important contact was established with the Chair of the Liverpool City Region's Transport Committee – an elected body – which would be followed up in the next period.
6. **We Said No** The podcast series continued throughout this period covering topics of rail access, the role of Rimrose Valley and local green spaces in supporting football/local sports activities, our Manchester demonstration (see below) and the importance of the wildflower project. All episodes include local contributors and we are able to track the number of downloads/plays
 7. **Media coverage** Press releases remain a key tool for the campaign and we continued to keep the story in the news with major developments covered locally via the Liverpool Echo, BBC Radio Merseyside, Granada TV and BBC North West Tonight.
 8. **Funding** The Charity was successful in a new funding application to Foundation for Integrated Transport, lowering the amount asked for and seeking match funding via an application to Patagonia Action Works, which was also successful. A combination of these 2 grants secured the role of campaign coordinator for 2 days per week for this accounting period, putting the campaign in a secure position. The campaign also held several in-store fundraising events at LUSH in Liverpool. These proceeds go towards the general costs of running the campaign – leaflets, signs and design costs.
 9. **Consultations** During this period, the campaign responded to key consultations and encouraged supporters to do the same. These included the following: Active Travel measures, Nature Recovery Strategy; Re-regulation of buses; Strategic Development Plan. All of these relate to transport and the use of green space, so participation in them was important.
 10. **Demonstration – The BIG push to LUSH** August 2023. This activity consisted of a 6-mile march from Rimrose Valley along the Leeds-Liverpool canal towpath to Mann Island in the city centre, home of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. Its purpose was to highlight the vital role the Metro Mayor, Steve Rotherham, and the LCRCA has in solving the issues around port access. The Metro Mayor and Chief Exec of the LCRCA declined our invitation to meet us, but we were greeted by Cllr Steve Foulkes, Chair of the LCRCA's Transport Committee. He gave unequivocal support for the campaign to save the park and to demand better solutions. We received coverage on Granada news and the event was well attended, despite bad weather. We ended the walk with refreshments in LUSH's Liverpool store to acknowledge their support and to thank people for attending.
 11. **Demonstration – Our Rags, Your Riches** October 2023. This demo consisted of members of the public joining us outside the Port of Liverpool's Seaforth entrance to tie strips of green fabric to their fencing as a symbol of our opposition to the proposed road and to highlight the port's involvement in these plans. This mirrored the actions of campaigners against fracking at the Preston New Road site. Old and young wrote their wishes for the future of Rimrose Valley on pieces of card, which were also tied to the fence. Again, the event was well attended despite challenging weather

12. **Campaign Strategy.** In March 2023, Chris Todd, Director of Transport Action Network and long-time supporter of the campaign visited Liverpool to deliver a campaign workshop to ensure that the campaign team and wider community remain engaged in the fight to save the park and come up with new ways of communicating our messages. This support was gratefully received and resulted in a positive day of workshops and activities held at Marine FC
13. **Petition** At the time of writing signatures stand at 16,127
14. **Presentations** Throughout this period, we delivered several presentations about our work to local schools (Chesterfield High School, Waterloo Primary School) and a Patagonia in-store event; all to raise awareness of our work and how people can contribute
15. **Patagonia Gathering** As a result of our funding application, we were invited to attend Patagonia's "Tools for grassroots activists" conference in July. This was located on a farm in Wiltshire and consisted of 3 days' of presentations and workshops with campaigners from across the country, offering an ideal opportunity to network, share experiences and skills and to raise awareness of each other's work.

Achievements and Performance

The Charity continued to raise awareness of Rimrose Valley Country Park and this period was the most active in its short history in terms of delivering events and activities.

The campaign measures its performance by the status of the road proposal. Construction should have commenced in 2020. Instead, National Highways were notified in March 2023 that the road proposal has been deferred until 2025 at the earliest, as outlined above.

The campaign will use this newly found time to ramp up efforts to ensure that the road project is cancelled completely, in favour of better, more sustainable solutions.

Financial Review

1. The Charity is regularly funded by public donation. It has a LocalGiving account which can accept one-off donations as well as recurring direct debits.
2. The Charity has actively applied for grants and other funding to finance both the Charity's activities and events and the work of the Save Rimrose Valley campaign. All funds applied for are ringfenced for their specific purpose and are clearly referenced in the Charity's accounts
3. The Accounts for the financial year 2023/24 will be prepared and audited by Sefton CVS and will be reviewed and approved at the upcoming AGM.

Declaration