NEWSLETTER No. 14

Friends of Meadow Park

SUMMER 2008

WHAT MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT??

IN MARCH 2007, Rushcliffe Borough Council invited East Leake Parish Council to consider taking over the management of the park if suitable terms could be agreed. Given the long history of poor service when management was wholly controlled by the Borough, notably the hit and miss mowing arrangements for the largest grassland areas, the Parish Council rapidly agreed in principle, and it was left to the Borough Council's legal team to draw up a contract.

Kingston Brook in Spring

The Management Plan, on which a contract was to be based, had gone through half a dozen versions over several years; the Borough produced what was supposed to be the definitive version in December 2006. Both the Parish Council and the Friends were unhappy with certain aspects of it, and in April their representatives met yet again with Borough officers to iron out problems, mostly to do with defining precise areas of responsibility.

A draft contract was delivered in early June (well over a year after the Parish Council's response) and you may well have read recent press reports that the management hand-over would be effective from 1 July. **Not so**. The contract was still based on the December Management Plan, and in any case had a number of clauses which the Parish Council could not accept, not least extremely vague financial proposals.

So it's back to the Rushcliffe drawing board, and yet again we do not know when the hay meadows will be cut (should be in mid– to late-July after most of the flowers have seeded, and again in September).

Meanwhile, the Friends carry on doing the sort of jobs we've always done. All major tasks appear under headings in the Management Plan, although not all of them are envisaged as volunteer tasks.

Unfortunately, what neither the Friends nor the Parish Council can do until it's all sorted out is make plans for improving the park in any meaningful way. It might help concentrate minds in West Bridgford if a lot of East Leake residents were to e-mail one of the officers mainly responsible for looking after Meadow Park and urge them to get cracking:

bknowles@rushcliffe.gov.uk

cbullett@rushcliffe.gov.uk

PLEASE HELP!

CARNIVAL 2008

Congratulations to the East Leake Carnival Committee for another successful event.

And thank you to everyone who supported the Friends of Meadow Park stall..

We made almost £160, a very welcome addition to our funds.

Membership of FMP stands at just over 80, and we would welcome more—please spread the word and encourage others to join.

Phone 853345

or e-mail meadowpark@eastleake.net

We know it isn't easy to commit yourself to attending all our Activity Days, but please try to come occasionally. There's always work for the less energetic as well as for our strong-arm merchants!

HEDGEROW MANAGEMENT

Some people questioned the wisdom of the hedgelaying that the Friends undertook last Autumn, so we asked for a professional's opinion, and received the following from

PAUL PHILLIPS, Environmental Sustainability Officer, Rushcliffe Borough Council:

Hedgelaying at Meadow Park

Hedgerows have traditionally been managed by a process called 'laying' or 'layering'; all of the old hedges on Meadow Park have been laid in the past.

What is hedgelaying?

Hedgelaying involves removing part of the hedge, leaving long tall stems or pleachers; these are then partly cut through close to the ground, often using a saw or a billhook (a sharp bladed tool), until the pleacher can be bent over until it is at about a 30 degree angle from the ground. Often these pleachers, when they have been layed over, will be strengthened with upright wooden stakes hammered into the ground. The hedge may be finished by weaving a layer of hazel (heatherings or bindings) along the top of the stakes. The hedge will then be tidied up.

Why are hedges laid?

A hedge which is left unmanaged will eventually form a row of trees with large gaps between each tree. When hedgerows were used to keep farm animals in fields, this would be a problem, so hedgerows were laid every 10 – 20 years to keep them stock proof. When a hedge is laid, it quickly recovers and thickens up from the base of the hedge. A lot of wildlife has adapted to use these managed hedgerows, including small birds, mammals and butterflies which find food and safe homes, in the dense base of the hedge.

Why are we laying hedges at Meadow Park

The hedgerows on Meadow Park are a remnant from the previous agricultural use of this area; they help to show the heritage of this site and add to its wildlife value. The hedgerows need to be managed to prevent them becoming overgrown and gappy and eventually ceasing to exist. Hedgelaying can seem drastic when it is first done, but within a couple of years the hedge is better than before laying, therefore over time it is planned to lay all the hedges in the park and continually re-lay a section each year.

Further Information

If you require further information on hedgelaying at Meadow Park, please contact Paul Phillips, Environmental Sustainability Officer, Rushcliffe Borough Council. 0115 9148 595 or email environmentalissues@rushcliffe.gov.uk

Hedge in Bateman Field. Newly laid, November 2007 & in Spring leaf, May 2008

All the major tasks the Friends of Meadow Park undertake are in accordance with the Management Plan drawn up by Rushcliffe Borough Council, the owners of the land.

During 2007, the Friends of Meadow Park contributed 340 hours of voluntary labour to the upkeep and improvement of the park.

ACTIVITY DAYS JANUARY TO APRIL

Conrad Oatey's report on January's session:

A dry day but a cool wind, with 12 volunteers.

The objective of this additional workday was to complete the section of hedgelaying started in November 2007 in Bateman Field. Most had attended the previous session, but 3 novices were given some basic training by Conrad. The pleachers were soon dropping at a rate of knots and certainly kept the positioning / staking team busy.

After a well-earned coffee break courtesy of Debbie, the final pieces were laid and a team of 4 undertook the binding. The rest trimmed up the hedge and cut the stakes on the diagonal. Work was completed just after 12 noon.

Neil Hunter kindly delivered the stakes and binders required (a further 30 stakes and 40 binders) and Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust kindly lent billhooks.

February

We had the annual blitz on the next five plus metres of the Kingston Brook southern bank. Two large hawthorn trees were coppiced down to a couple of feet and some overgrown branches trimmed from one of the biggest willows. In addition, three large logs which had been obstructing the stream were hauled out, releasing pop bottles and what looked like an old mattress to float down towards Kegworth.

BEFORE AND AFTER

Unfortunately, as the date clashed with half-term, we were a bit short on numbers - we only managed seven.

Conrad with some of the smaller new growths, which were diggable - just

March

As we've explained before, we have an **American** species of dogwood in a number of places in the park. It is highly aggressive, particularly so in the south-west corner of Hall Field, where we have twice had a go at dragging and cutting it. The Borough Council then promised to deal with it, but didn't. We hoped to have the loan of a mechanical digger this time, but in the event it was back to muscle power. So a dozen people got busy and cleared a sufficient area to plant a batch of alder whips which will in time make a much more appropriate copse in that corner. While that was going on, two other Friends planted some **English** dogwood whips in the triangular copse near the south-east corner of Bateman Field.

April

It was the annual Parish Spring Clean Day, and as usual we got busy with litter grabbers and a stack of black bags in the park. Only half a dozen Friends came (some were doing their bit elsewhere in the village), so we appreciated the help of a group of Cubs, who brought some parents along as well. Two hours and twelve bags' worth of rubbish later the place looked a lot better.

ACTIVITY DAYS MAY TO JULY

May

You will have observed that quite often our Activity Days involve a paddle in the brook! Fortunately, there are a number of Friends who seem willing to brave the cold and the mud, and six of what one of them described as the "heavy brigade" spent a morning cutting back some of the large willow branches which

Trout-tickling? Alan & Andy are certainly concentrating hard .

overhang the Kingston Brook near its western end and frequently cause back-up of the stream, impeding its flow.

A couple of a more delicate constitution carried on with the endless chore of path-trimming around the south-western edge of Gibson's Field, which it is now possible to walk through without being stung by nettles or having the loose stem of a dogrose wave in your face.

Gibson's Field

A real country footpath just 10 yards from the road and some of the wildlife which seems to thrive rather too well!

June

It was a two-day effort this month, to carry on with the path improvement we know people appreciate.

The southern border of Oak Meadow and Bateman Field is the most heavily used route, so that was the target area again. The Borough Council provided the stone - 15 tons of it. On the Saturday morning, nine Friends barrowed and spread the stuff, with the aid of a tractor, and on Sunday six returned to put the finishing touches to it after a professional with a heavy roller had given it the first going over.

July

Last July's thistle-pulling in Oak Meadow made quite an impact, so a repeat performance was called for. By the end of the morning, the nine Friends who turned up had deposited several heaps of both thistles and docks under the hedges, where they will be appreciated by our buggy friends and no longer be a problem for the farmer, when he eventually mows the meadow; he doesn't like feeding his cattle a diet of thistles.

*John **inside** the Major Oak enclosure, with a trophy handful of thistles.*

We had a kestrel in attendance part of the time, and the south-west corner of the field, where some of our wildflower plantings survive, was full of butterflies, meadow brown among them. **And** a newcomer to our plant population was spotted—Figwort.