NEWSLETTER No. 15

Friends of Meadow Park

AUTUMN & WINTER 2008-9

CARRYING ON REGARDLESS

We expected that this newsletter would announce the implementation of the new regime under which the Parish Council will be responsible for the park's routine management. We should have known better—see Kevin Shaw's report overleaf.

One adverse result of all the delay is that FMP cannot make long-term plans with confidence. However, our Autumn activities were not much diminished, and again featured hedge-laying. We published an article from Paul Phillips on the subject last year, but the following from Conrad Oatey gives a bit more detail:

Why lay hedges?

Until about 15 years ago, we were nationally losing more than 4,000 miles of hedges per year. Since 1947 we have lost almost half of England's hedgerows. Between 1947 and 1990, the total length of derelict and relict hedgerows rose by some 22,500 miles to 56,000 miles. Yet hedges are vital wildlife corridors which preserve biodiversity, providing windbreaks and shelter for all manner of creatures.

Hedge in the Play Field, layed last November

Hedges which are not managed eventually become just a line of trees, which in time will die and leave gaps. Trees are valuable for insects and larger nesting birds, but offer little for smaller birds and mammals. Hedges laid sensitively will allow some trees to grow, but will also provide thick cover at lower levels. The modern practice of flailing hedges may make them look tidy, but over time the lower sections of the hedge become sparse. This not only means they are no longer stock-proof, but their habitat value is diminished.

Most of our resident woodland birds breed or feed in hedgerows, such as the hedge sparrow, wren and goldfinch. They are joined by summer insect feeders such as whitethroats and winter berry-foragers such as fieldfare and redwing. Hedgehogs, voles, shrews and mice use hedges for shelter and food. Reptiles can be seen basking on hedge banks and hunting amongst the stems.

Our plan is to look after our hedges in Meadow Park. This means that, each winter, we will lay some sections of hedge. Hedgelaying is an ancient craft (believed to have been around in Roman times), but it peaked around 1800 at the time of the Enclosure Act. It involves almost cutting through bushes, laying them over and usually staking them until everything re-grows. Done properly every 20 years or so it produces a dense hedge which can remain vigorous indefinitely. Hedgelaying is usually done between October and March, to avoid disturbing nesting birds.

Each part of the country (and in some cases each county) evolved its own style of hedgelaying, and its own tools (billhooks) for the work. In this area we use the Midlands (Bullock) style, which has stakes down the middle of the hedge and a woven hazel top (binders). As its name suggests, it is strong enough to keep cattle in. The stakes and binders will rot in a few years, by which time the cut stems (pleachers) will have grown strong enough to require no support.

OUR AUTUMN & WINTER TASKS

September - general pruning, clearing growth above last year's layed hedge in Bateman Field.

October - clearing overgrown path along north side of Hall Field. Preparation for hedge laying in Play Field

November- hedge laying in Play Field. Checking nest-boxes installed last December

December - Planting young alder trees in area previously cleared of dogwood (see page 4)

January - ground frozen, so session cancelled. A few people ventured out to re-site some nest-boxes.

TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS IN 2008

218

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 27 NOVEMBER, 2008

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It is now 7 years since a group of enthusiasts gathered in this room and agreed to form "The Friends", formally adopt the constitution and elect the first officers and committee.

A lot has happened in the intervening years.

Five different officers at Rushcliffe Borough Council have been involved in the management [of the park] over that period, but it is not until the current officer that we have someone who appears to actually care.

The Group has, however, continued to develop and grow, with membership double what it was in the early years, the finances very much healthier and far more challenging projects being taken on.

Last year I reported that the Borough Council had agreed to transfer the management of the park to the Parish Council. Believe it or not, but this is still in negotiation, with RBC taking an age to progress each stage. Hopefully, it will be signed and in place by 1st April 2009.

As most of you will be aware, I am now standing down as chairman, but if it is your wish I shall be happy to continue on the committee provided this does not cause conflicts of interest once I become manager of the park.

I cannot, however, let this opportunity pass to say a big "Thank you" to the members who turn out on a regular basis at the work mornings, and to the members of the committee who give their time to attend meetings and take on the responsibility of team leading at the work mornings.

A big thank you also to Mollie for the newsletters and to Conrad for looking after our finances so efficiently. Last, but by no means least, a very, very big thank you to Debs who does considerably more than act as secretary and produce the minutes - you would think the park was part of her back yard!

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. *Kevin Shaw*

SECRETARY'S REPORT

The full committee have again met 6 times this year, attendance has been adequate.

The sub committees have hardly met as most matters have been decided at normal meetings & there have not been any big projects planned as we are still waiting for the management transfer to go over to the Parish Council with a clear Management Plan.

The current membership has gone down to 85 members. Even though it is wonderful to have so many people interested in the park, we only have a core of about 12 members who are active. Please try to encourage more members if you can as it would be nice to see a few more faces at the activity sessions , but I do applaud the members who do tasks on their own as well.

During the year our PC representative, Marie Males, has been replaced by the current chair of the PC's Amenities committee, Mr Jeff Jones. We thank Marie for all her efforts this last year & are glad she wants to stay on the committee as an elected member.

Finally, the rumours are true; Kevin is handing over his crown. I'd like to say he's going on to bigger & better things but alas there's nothing bigger than this!!! – Sorry.

On behalf of the committee I'd like to thank him for all his sterling work these last 4 years, he'll be staying on the committee though, so he can still ride any dumper trucks we may hire.

Debbie Slade

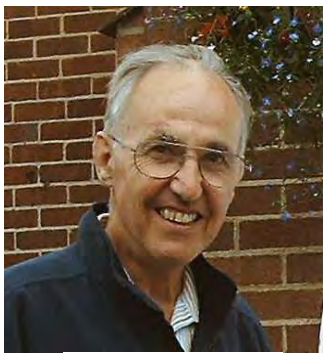
Kevin Shaw

ELECTIONS

Dennis Fox was elected Chairman, and Debbie Slade & Conrad Oatey were re-elected, Secretary & Treasurer respectively, all unopposed.

Committee members elected: John Adcock, Alan Barlow, Peter Bloxham, Neil Hunter, Mollie Jacques, Marie Males, Andrew Sandford & Kevin Shaw.

Paul Phillips represents Rushcliffe Borough Council and Jeff Jones represents the Parish Council.



Dennis Fox

TREASURER'S REPORT YEAR ENDING 31/10/08

2007/8 proved to be another positive year financially. Membership income rose slightly, and fundraising (via a stall at the carnival) was over £50 higher than that of the previous year. A grant of £155.63 was obtained from Rushcliffe Borough Council to cover the insurance costs for 2006/7. Since we have now received grants for insurance for the maximum of 3 years, I plan in the coming year to seek grants to cover part of our project costs (totalling £164.97). Other income (£285) was a grant from one of our Rushcliffe Councillor's Electoral Fund for a seat to replace the one near the sculpture which was vandalised. This has not been purchased in this financial year.

About the same was spent on projects during this year as in 2006/7. This included materials for nestboxes, stakes and binders for hedgelaying, tree whips, safety equipment (hard hats and tough gloves) and the hire of equipment to help with path work. Over £240 has just been spent on hedgelaying and other tools, but this was too late for inclusion in this year's accounts.

A healthy balance of £1,263.71 is carried forward to help fund the coming year's activities.

Conrad Oatey,

ACCOUNTS FOR THE PERIOD 01/11/07 TO 31/10/08

2007		2008		
	Receipts			
344.00	Member donations	373.00		
0.00	Other donations	10.00		
155.63	Grants	155.63		Note 1
21.00	Sale of notelets/photos	34.50		
0.00	Bank interest	0.00		
84.40	Fund raising	135.06		Note 2
170.50	Other	285.00		Note 3
£643.18			£993.19	
	Payments			
35.00	Subscription BTCV	35.00		
155.63	Insurance	155.63		
14.00	Cost of sale materials	14.00		
15.00	Publicity/Education	4.00		
302.22	Projects	286.00		Note 4
70.50	Other	0.00		
£592.35			£494.63	
£183.18	**Excess of receipts over payments**		£498.56	
	Bank reconciliation			
581.97	Opening balance in bank	765.15		
775.53	Add total receipts	993.19		
1,357.50		1,758.34		
592.35	Less total payments	494.63		
£765.15	Balance carried forward	£1,263.71		

Notes

1. RBC grant for 2007 insurance
2. Carnival
3. RBC for replacement bench
4. Nestboxes (£50.53), hedgelaying (£79.00), plants (£24.97) safety equipment (£61.00), path work (£70.50)

WHY ARE WE REMOVING DOGWOODS?

Rushcliffe Borough Council is concerned that our management plan should allow only the planting of native British species in Meadow Park. There are some good reasons for this if we are considering the wildlife conservation interests of the area.

Firstly, many non-native species are very aggressive and drive out or smother less robust natives. There are countless examples of this worldwide, including the problems of the rabbit and the Prickly Pear in Australia. In this country, examples of introduced species causing problems include the Grey Squirrel, Rhododendrons and Sycamore. Very recently we have seen Floating Pennywort being a nuisance in the River Soar.

Above
Dogwood—brilliant Autumn colouring
Below
Alder catkins, new and old

Secondly, plants that have been established for a long time (native plants) support a far greater number and variety of insects, which in turn support more animals, including bats and birds. Oaks, for example, support 423 species of insects and mites, Willows 450, Hawthorns 149, and Ash 41, whereas the corresponding figures for Horse Chestnut and Sweet Chestnut, which are not native, are 4 & 5. Many more recently introduced species have even fewer insects associated with them. Thus native plants are at the base of many food chains, and so encourage the conservation of more species. There are some misconceptions regarding the value of some non-native species. Buddleia, for instance, attracts some butterfly species, but does little to promote their conservation. The food plants of the butterfly larvae are much more important.

Lastly, we should not ignore the appearance of the landscape. Aesthetic considerations are admittedly subjective, but most people would find a landscape of native plants more attractive than one incorporating non-native species such as eucalyptus, leylandii or flowering currant.

Ironically, RBC have themselves introduced a non-native (probably North American) Dogwood species into the Park, mainly along the railway embankment in Hall Field. This plant looks very attractive with its red stems and brilliant autumn foliage. Unfortunately it is proving very aggressive and we are making an effort to remove it - or at least curtail its spread. The plan is to cut it back and plant native Alders instead. This is proving to be a difficult task but, if we leave it, how much more difficult will it be in ten years time?

So, on our activity days we are making an effort to ensure that, in future, all the trees we plant are not only native species but also of British provenance.

John Adcock

IT'S THE LAW!!

If you let your dog foul in public places like Meadow Park without clearing up after it, you are committing an offence and may be fined up to £1,000.

Rushcliffe Borough Council has provided a number of special waste bins —please make use of them. When the dog warden visits the park, he will certainly prosecute anyone he sees breaking the law.

We all know dog mess is a health hazard as well as being very unpleasant if you get it on yourself or your clothes.

It is only a matter of courtesy to other users of the park to behave responsibly.

Don't be afraid to point this out to anyone you see not clearing up after their pet.

ACTIVITY DAYS

The next dates for you to remember are:

Sunday 8 March

Hedgelaying in Hall Field, to complete the section we layed last November. This will be a longer session, 10am till about 2pm.
Tools, strong gloves **and tuition** provided.

* Less strenuous work always available.

Saturday 4 April

"Spring Clean Day" to coincide with the Parish Council's village-wide effort. It's also the time for bringing the shrubbery up to scratch for the season.

May, June & July arrangements await the evaluation of the alternating Saturday/Sunday experiment.

PLEASE tell us what you like and dislike about the park, and also about any projects you think would improve the park and the pleasure people can get from it.

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