NEWSLETTER No. 18

Friends of Meadow Park

SPRING & SUMMER 2010

FUNDING FORTUNES

A "Local Improvement Scheme" doesn't sound all that exciting, but through the good offices of our County Councillor Lynn Sykes, we were successful in bidding for financial support from Nottinghamshire County Council's community environmental budget, with genuinely exciting consequences.

Hedge layers at work

This initiative aims to support schemes which will either involve a large number of residents or be of demonstrable community value. Under its terms, the recipients, i.e. in this case the Friends of Meadow Park, do not actually receive any cash, but projects that win approval are taken over by county council officers and carried through to completion. This way, the county council has control of how things progress, and where appropriate can benefit from the economies of scale. Local volunteer effort is not stifled, because all the detailed planning is done through consultation, and volunteers can be involved physically, too, if the work is suitable.

It helped our cause that Alex Price, the officer assigned to our application, is an East Leake girl and familiar with Meadow Park. At a site meeting with her, three FMP representatives discussed quite a number of items on our wish list, and it is almost certain that in addition to the arboretum project (see back page) Alex will be able find the funds to improve the path network in the park far more effectively than we have been able to over the years with our hard manual labour.

While these negotiations were still at a very early stage, we were pointed in the direction of Groundwork-Nottingham. This is a big not-for-profit organisation, heavily Lottery-funded, which gives advice and support to community groups such as FMP. They have financial and technical experts on hand, including a landscape specialist, Jo Phelan, who will be visiting the park during August.

They regularly work with the county and borough councils, and are well-known to both Alex Price and to Rushcliffe Borough Council's community environment officer, Paul Phillips, so liaison should be no problem. As land-owner, of course, the borough council has to give permission for any undertaking within the park, which must also conform to the provisions of the management plan.

It is unfortunate that firm news about these hopeful beginnings will have to wait for the next newsletter—watch this space, as they say!.

AUTUMN ACTIVITY DAYS 2010

SATURDAY 11 September

Hall Field - reducing dominant scrub, especially the far too vigorous brambles, and letting in a bit more light and air

SATURDAY 4 October

Coppicing hazel bushes in the copses in e.g. Gibson's Field. If enough volunteers, cutting down large young hawthorn to the north of the Play Field.

SATURDAY 13 November

Next stretch of hedge laying OR participating in planting of the Arboretum (see article above & on p4)

SATURDAY 11 December

To be announced—but you won't escape!!

Please get along as often as you can. If the task is a strenuous one, there's always easier work available.

AS EVER -

MEET AT THE SCULPTURE AT 10am

A quick run-down of responsibility in MEADOW PARK for those who are foxed by the complexities of

local government (probably most of us!)

The County Council has no statutory involvement, except for the definitive footpath network (Kingfisher Walk) It can also fund some voluntary activity e.g. it paid for printing the walks leaflet.

The Borough Council OWNS THE LAND, plus the balance of the capital sum which came with the land when the Kirks donated it, and is reserved for major work like repairing the bridges. Routine maintenance is financed from the annual revenue budget. It also makes grants to community groups, e.g. it paid for some hedging and other tools. It holds the all-important Management Plan and must approve any project proposed by FMP.

The Parish Council has no statutory commitment, but by delegation from Rushcliffe carries out essential routine maintenance. It is supportive of FMP and can occasionally offer a little funding.

The Friends have no powers at all! We undertake non-essential maintenance tasks and improvements (also some arguably essential ones, like clearing pathways). As a voluntary body, we can often access funding not available to either borough or parish councils.

2010 ACTIVITIES SO FAR

January was pretty busy, with three sessions.

We confronted the everlasting dogwood problem, trying to remove young plants that were encroaching into Hall Field from across the western path.

Unfortunately, the dozen or so brave volunteers who attended found themselves confronting some truly atrocious weather as well!

The end of the month was much kinder, and there were two sessions arranged to finish laying the last tricky section of the Bateman Field hedge nearest to the Kingston Brook.

Using new tools purchased with a Conservation Grant from Rushcliffe Borough Council, hedgelaying and other complicated tasks have become much easier to achieve, and at the same time, our volunteers are becoming more skilled, so by the end of the second day the job was complete.

February saw the last hedgelaying session of the autumn/winter season, and enough volunteers turned up to get on with other jobs as well.

One group carried on hedgelaying in Bateman Field, another completed the clearance of the undergrowth from the eastern side of the rest of the hedge (ready for laying next year), while the third chopped up the brash remaining from the January sessions, ready for burning at a later date. Several hawthorn trees, and one elder, were left as standards in the laid hedge. The section to be laid next year contains 3 or 4 ash trees, which will also be left.

In **March**, we again had enough people to do two jobs. Rather more than half our number took young hawthorn saplings from Hall Field, and transplanted them along the inside of the new rail fence near the Bateman Road entrance, where they should thicken up into a good secure hedge. The rest dug up and removed (for burning) yet more dogwood saplings from Hall Field.

Our **April** session was, as usual, "Spring Clean Day"; perhaps it should be renamed "Black Bin-bag Day"! The shrub border also got some early seasonal attention.

Our chosen Saturday in **May** was wretchedly wet, but a dozen members battled it out with barrows, shovels and rakes on our annual path improvement slog, mostly along the eastern side of the Play Field. We notched up 27½ volunteer hours, which was great in the circumstances.

une, our "Lop-and-Chop" session was aimed at keeping the paths open, especially that around Gibson's Field which gets very overgrown. It's a tedious maintenance job that has to be done every year, and it's amazing how sharp and strong the thorns on the long dogrose stems are!

Our **July** task was another annual regular. The farmer who mows the major fields understandably doesn't like too many thistles and docks in his hay or silage, and Oak Meadow used to be riddled with both, plus ragwort. Over the last four years, we have greatly improved the quality of what the farmer gets by pulling or cutting these rough, tough plants. We all benefit, because now other more attractive but more tender wildflowers and grasses have a better chance of developing, which is an important objective in the park management plan.

WHY TRY TO RECREATE AN OLD HAY MEADOW?

This wonderful field full of colour is sadly nowhere near Meadow Park!

Red campion

The coarse gravels and silt-cum-clay alluvial soils of Meadow Park are never going to compare with the country's limestone uplands or chalky downs when it comes to supporting wild flowers, so why bother?

The simplest answer is for their appearance. They provide a more pleasing variety of colour and form than even a well-mixed spread of grass.

The more important reasons are firstly to return the old arable fields, which had been heavily fertilised in recent years, into something nearer the meadows they historically were, and secondly to extend the biological diversity of the area as much as possible. Different flowers attract different moths, butterflies and other insects, which attract different birds and small mammals, making the park more interesting and also increasing its educational value, which is one of FMP's commitments.

Ox-eyed daisy

Trevor Jones writes:

MEADOW PARK FLOWER MEADOW

Only 2-3% of our nation's original flower meadows now remain. Some evolved over the past 1000 years and are as priceless to nature lovers as buildings of similar provenance are valued by others.

The natural ("peak") vegetation of most of the UK is forest, not grassland. Our ancestors created the fields by clearing forest and draining marshland, then grazing by domesticated animals established *permanent* grassland. Hay was harvested in summer for winter feeding. Even meadows reserved for hay production were grazed at some times of the year and dung containing seeds was deposited. Manure from winter housed animals was spread on hay meadows as fertiliser. Farm animals (plus dung beetles!) markedly influenced which plant species flourished. Even the word "cowslip" is derived from Middle English *cowslyppe*, referring to that plant's association with sloppy cow pats, which would become fertile patches on unfertile soil. There were, of course, weeds and poisonous plants in addition to attractive flowers in this lost paradise. Even in the 19th century there were valued natural lush grass pastures on *fertile* soil which produced few flowers.

Flower meadows were part of a system of farming and will not reappear in the absence of grazing animals and relatively infertile soil. Taking hay crops without compensatory fertilisation will eventually reduce soil fertility in Meadow Park: grass growth will be reduced and species diversification occur.

Not being a part of a system of agriculture, aspects of the current national flower meadow movement veer towards horticulture. Some authenticity would be achieved if plants present in the early years of the last century could be re-established, but they could be swamped by weeds and non-native plant species. The tendency for reversion to forest via scrub, which agriculture effectively counters, will persist

If an element of horticulture is acceptable, developments unique to East Leake could be considered - for example, flowers sown with dwarf ryegrass normally used for golf courses or an extensive very low maintenance wild flower garden on one of the small fields. These are concepts for discussion, not a proposal for action!

As always, comments and ideas would be welcomed, preferably by email, to meadowpark@eastleake.net

WHAT'S AN ARBORETUM—AND WHY DO WE WANT ONE?

The Macmillan Dictionary puts it quite succinctly:

"An **arboretum** is a place where trees are grown so that they can be studied"

wordiq.com tells us more:

"An **arboretum** is a botanical garden primarily devoted to trees and other woody plants, forming a living collection of trees intended at least partly for scientific study.

The term 'arboretum' was first used in English by J. C. Loudon in 1838 in his encyclopaedic book *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum*, but the concept was already long-established by then.

The first arboretum to be designed and planted was the **Arboretum Trsteno**, near Dubrovnik in Croatia. Its start date is unknown, but it was already in existence by 1492. It was created by the prominent local Gucetic family, who were recorded as requesting ship captains to bring back seeds and plants from their travels.

The first public arboretum in England was Derby Arboretum, laid out by J.C. Loudon, and donated to the citizens of Derby by Joseph Strutt, in September 1840. In 1859 it was visited by Frederick Law Olmsted on his European tour of parks, and it had an influence on the planting in Central Park, New York"

HORNBEAM

One of the stated objectives in the management plan, which underpins all projects in Meadow Park, is to develop its educational potential, so it is not surprising that it has long been an ambition among the Friends to establish an arboretum, a sort of living "reference library".

As has been reported in previous newsletters, our proposals were repeatedly thwarted, firstly by the borough council's strict "native species only" requirement and latterly by the difficulty of raising the necessary finance. Now, however, (see p.1), considerable funding is coming our way, so the work a small sub-committee did back in 2006 has been taken off its shelf and revised, and has become the blueprint for final planning in the next few weeks (bearing in mind that the best time for tree-planting is late autumn, we are now nearing counting-down).

The following details may be subject to some alteration, but we believe that the County Council environment officer in charge of the project will adhere closely to our suggestions.

The chosen area for planting is the southern portion of Bateman Field, between the path and the road boundary. This will make use of a number of maturing trees which Neil Hunter kindly donated to the park, and which we planted in 2002.

The list of trees, chosen for their interest and variety, totals about 25, and more than half of them are "native" British. The rest are mostly so long resident that they are designated "naturalised", and only three were "introductions" in more recent centuries. They will be planted in groups of three or so, depending on family, rose, birch, conifer, poplar etc. We have suggested planting four very large growing species, oak, beech and horse and sweet chestnuts, as individual specimens further over towards the railway embankment.

The funding includes proper staking and protection, and exact labelling, with the scientific Latin as well as English names. In the future, to extend what we hope will be considerable public interest, we intend to produce leaflets, including material that could be used by teachers.

Once everything is finalised, a planting plan and list of tree species will be put on the Meadow Park web pages (www.east-leake.co.uk) In the meantime, have a look at www.british-trees.com, an excellent website created by the Woodland Trust, from which the adjoining illustrations of the hornbeam were taken.

A WALK IN THE COUNTRY!

Meadow Park is flat and has no stiles, so provides the ideal place for easy walking.

Dennis Fox has devised 2 walks (one mile and two miles long respectively) which criss-cross the park and let you see the considerable variety of habitat it offers.

With the support of the Borough and Parish Councils and of the East Leake Medical Practice, we have put together an explanatory leaflet, which is available free of charge at the parish office and the library.

We are grateful to Nottinghamshire County Council for kindly funding the printing of this.