NEWSLETTER No. 23

AUTUMN & WINTER 2012

CONTRASTING IMAGES OF NOVEMBER, 2012

First, the GOOD news…..

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust shortlisted the Friends of Meadow Park for an award this year and, at the recent presentation evening, two of our number had their photograph taken with Bill Oddie, the star celebrity guest.

More to the point, Professor David Bellamy, who chaired the judges' panel, was highly complimentary about our achievements and placed us second. As the winner was a large organisation that wrestles with the environmental problems of an inner-city community, we didn't feel too downcast by this.

The real disappointment was missing out on the cash element of gaining first place, as fund-raising to carry out the next phase of path improvements across the park is proving hard. At the time of writing, we have a couple of applications in the pipeline and fingers tightly crossed. Of all the projects FMP have taken on, making more of the park accessible to a wide range of visitors has won the most positive response from the public, so we would really like to get on with it.

…….. and then, the BAD.

After last summer's drought and the driest spring on record, the whole country was saturated by the autumn rains, and Meadow Park certainly got its share. Anyone in doubt as to the accuracy of the definition "flood land" to describe our chunk of the Kirk family farm, so kindly given to the village, will now appreciate just why it was excluded from the Brookfields Way estate.

It seemed that all the good work on the paths might have been washed away, but on first inspection after the waters receded the majority appears to have survived; more detailed examination will be needed once the ground has dried properly. It does look, however, as if some of the funds we are looking for may have to be used for repair work before we can start on the new.

A seriously unwelcome consequence of all that silt-laden water spread over the fields is that our efforts over many years to reduce the fertility of the land may just have been undone. The brook carries nutrients from many sources as it runs from Wysall and beyond, and our wild flower meadows really do not want them.

Another possible casualty is the "wild flower ribbon" in Oak Meadow (see page 4) - again, we must wait and see, but first indications are hopeful in that a lot of the seed so recently put down is still there, and there's even a sign of early germination of some species.

Photos of a sorry-looking park taken by Vicenta Rose & Andrew Sandford

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, November 2012

From the Chairman's Report:

".....We have enjoyed another excellent year.

We received a Community Award from Rushcliffe Borough Council in November 2011 and this was followed by a Green Flag Award in July. Only last week the Friends group were runners-up for the Environmentalist of the Year Award from Nottinghamshire Green Guardians. This is administered by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust and we were judged by Professor David Bellamy. One of our hosts was Bill Oddie.

2012 saw us finalising the Local Improvement Scheme grant of £20,000 from Nottinghamshire County Council, which provided the arboretum, some new seating and the two information plinths.

Matt Youdale from Arch Communications, made a most generous donation which we converted into more weather-proof paths, increasing accessibility to more users. Other funding has come from the Rushcliffe Community Support Scheme and Rushcliffe Nature Conservation. Several kind individuals have given us money in remembrance of their loved ones who enjoyed using the park.

About a dozen of us constitute the physical team meeting once a month for activities such as hedge laying; others are involved in preparing newsletters and running the educational programme of wildlife walks in early summer. Bird boxes have to be monitored and repaired and this year we also did a survey of Kingston Brook looking at invertebrate populations.

Many of you are the unsung heroes who quietly pick up other folks' litter and assist us through your membership fees. We continue to have a supportive relationship with both the parish council and with the land- owner, Rushcliffe Borough Council. We were involved with the Village Community Plan and feedback showed Meadow Park to be the people's choice for 'favourite place in the village'.

Our population is over 7,000 and another 400 houses are on the drawing board. So, we have a heady responsibility to look after and develop Meadow Park. Simon King, President of the Wildlife Trusts, alerts us to the idea that if an area looks well managed the feeling is that there is no need for us to get involved. That is a risk for us in Meadow Park. In 2012 a small number of volunteers put in over 400 hours of physical work. This is similar to 2011, but without new recruits to our ranks we will struggle.

Everything I have said so far has been pretty positive. Disappointments for me continue to be dog and paper refuse and our complete failure at being able to establish any relationship with our local schools. These children are the guardians of the future and their comments to the Village Plan show they really care. Is the curriculum really so overcrowded that the 'open-air classrooms' of yesteryear are redundant? I believe this is a key area that our Friends Group needs to look at and develop....."

Alan Barlow

From the Secretary's Report:

".....Membership stands at 121. There have been 5 full committee meetings over the past year, all well attended, plus various sub - committee meetings.

There was a time when a meeting finished at 9.30 p.m. and a line was drawn under it. Some problems used to sort themselves out in the 2 months between meetings, or be overtaken by events. Now we aim to email the first draft minutes on the morning following the meeting, so that members who could not attend are kept updated. We are virtually in session 24 hours a day, 7 days a week! There is something about an email which demands a prompt response and Friends of Meadow Park progresses rapidly. There is more work. There is also the snag of two Committee Members not being on the internet

Members will have received the 11 page 2011 AGM Minutes and reports. I sometimes wonder when compiling minutes how many people actually read them. But detailed minutes definitely paid dividends this year, because a non-member, Matt Youdale donated £5000 with no strings attached in response to an item in the minutes of a meeting published on our website. Organisations can be judged on their minutes when applying for grants....."

Trevor Jones

Treasurer's Report

"2011/12 Proved to be an exceptional year for FMP financially. Membership income rose by £38 but it was the very generous donation of £5000 from Arch Communications, plus two further amounts, which raised the total donations to £5140.

Sales were slightly down on last year and due to our not taking part in the carnival there was no income from fund-raising. Grants were received from NCC [remainder from path/arboretum project], RBC [wildflower seeds] and RBC Community Fund [wild flower seeds] totalling £1012.40. Overall income was a grand total of £6857.40

Expenditure at £7710.48 was high this year because of the main projects carried out - the path renewal and new bench at Bateman Road entrance: £7150.

Although expenditure this year was in excess of receipts [-£853] the opening balance of £1644.97 allowed a total of £791.89 to be carried forward for 2012/13.

There are two outstanding projects ongoing which require payment but there are enough funds available to cater for these and we also have another RBC grant in the pipeline."

Andy Denker

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AUTUMN ACTIVITIES

September

12 volunteers spent a very warm morning cutting back the rampant dogwood and bramble on the west side of Hall Field nearest the railway. Large amounts of waste material were dragged into the undergrowth to rot.

A number of small "bays" were made into the thicket, letting in a bit more air and light.

October

There were 8 volunteers in total, who managed to coppice back a fair number of overgrown sallows next to the path through Lagoon Field, preventing further encroachment and allowing more light down to the grassy areas here.

November

Eleven volunteers came along, and cleared a load of overgrown old hedgerow material from the NW boundary of Little Meadow in readiness for an extended hedge-laying session in December.

This produced a couple of strange finds! We think the specimen on the right may be *Hebeloma Sinapizans.* It smells of raw potatoes, is poisonous, and causes stomach upsets - we didn't try it. Nobody fancied a drink out of the other object, either!

December

We had nine volunteers, some of whom were able to stay longer than our usual 2 hour session. Even so, we were defeated by the extremely irregular and sparse remains of the original hedge and only completed about 75% of the stretch we'd prepared. But we also did a spot of fence repair in the arboretum and fixed a nest-box - it's all go when you're a Friend!

January 2013

The first Activity Day will be Saturday 12 January. Please come and help complete the Little Meadow hedge, and shift the large amount of brash we accumulated into Lagoon Field, where it can be shredded by the Parish Council contractor.

Time and numbers permitting, we may try to tidy up "Electric Avenue" in Gibsons Field.

From Ann Weekley's Annual Wildflower Report

"A largely very cold and grey January and February meant very few flowers bloomed in the first two months – only white dead-nettle, dandelion, snowdrop and common field speedwell…….

The flowers in June and July, were healthy and numerous, none more so than the very welcome yellow rattle, an almost essential constituent of a flourishing flower meadow……..

The seeded areas in the arboretum were particularly successful and much admired by old (many of *us*!) and young (the Brownies) alike…….

In November, which began with cold, unsettled weather, 13 species were in flower plus dog rose and bramble……..

As well as recording this year's flowers month by month, I thought it would be interesting to go back through my records and count the total number of species seen since I began 'serious!' records in 2006. Amazingly 126 species have been recorded in flower (I have printed off a few copies for anyone interested). This year the total so far, which is unlikely to increase, is 101, the first time an annual count has been over 100. This reflects a steady increase from 83 in 2006, to 86 in2009, to 93 last year, a very encouraging trend.

I am not able to commit to monthly recordings next year but would like to think someone else will!"

IS THERE ANYONE WILLING & ABLE TO CARRY ON THIS GREAT SERVICE TO THE PARK?

A BAD YEAR FOR KINGSTON BROOK

The brook in early March. Note the partially stripped banks and the debris still clogging the water.

You may remember we were anxious about the effect that maintenance work carried out by Kingston Brook Internal Drainage Board in February might have on this water course which is the most significant environmental feature in the park.

Ian Morrissey, a Friend who is a professional expert in river management, first surveyed the brook for us in May 2002, and kindly offered to make a comparison survey 10 years on. He used a technique called "kick sampling", which sounds like a lot of fun, just splashing about in your wellies (Alan Barlow loves a paddle and was more than happy to go with him).

Actually, it's quite a precise process:

"*Kick sampling involves shuffling through the substrate moving in the opposite direction to the flow of the stream. This churns up the organisms inhabiting the substrate, and holding a net directly in front of your feet collects these organisms as the current of the stream tries to carry them away. The organisms may then be identified."* (Wikipedia)

Using a hand-held auto-analyser, Ian measured the invertebrate populations in three samples taken from different points in the stream. 18 taxa* were recorded at the richest sampling site (significantly, this was from an area not disturbed by the IDB), compared with 19 in 2002. This low number and the taxa identified indicated comparatively poor water quality, with no improvement since 2002, whilst nationally similar waterways have improved.

Ian's report makes clear that ideally, from the habitat point of view, a brook should be allowed to meander**, which would produce variations in width and depth and therefore variable water speeds. By contrast, the flood control work carried out by the IDB aimed to create a more uniform trapezoid cross section. Ian said that a deepened central channel would help, and that driving small wicker hurdles into the stream bed would create some variation. Obviously, measures such as these would be well outside the remit of FMP, but are worth discussing with Trent Valley Internal Drainage Board*** should the opportunity arise.

Since Ian's survey in September, the floods may well have caused some changes in the stream's profile and behaviour, whether permanent or temporary in nature remains to be seen.

* "Taxonomy" (Greek for "method of arrangement") is the science of biological classification. A "taxon" (plural "taxa") is a group of populations of individually minute organisms regarded as a unit.

** Kingston Brook did meander within the park once, and its old course can be seen in Bateman and Gibsons Fields. It was straightened some time before 1797, when the Enclosure Act allocations were made.

*** There was a law passed in 2011 to reorganise Internal Drainage Boards, and in April 2012 Kingston Brook IDB ceased to exist, subsumed within the much bigger Trent Valley IDB.

"WILD FLOWER RIBBON" IN OAK MEADOW

As part of our campaign to recreate lowland meadows, Neil Hunter, Kevin Gibbons & Andy Denker recently devised a new project, kindly financed in part by Cllr Mrs Males through her RBC members' allowance scheme.

Oak Meadow is species-poor, with very few flowering plants apart from docks, thistles and white clover, plus some grasses. It used to be regularly ploughed and re-seeded with grass for silage (once even serving as the village cricket pitch!), and has never recovered its original diversity, so was more than ripe for improvement.

Meadow Vetchling

The "ribbon" is a slightly curved strip running east–west, towards the northern verge of the field, with a total area of 750-1000 square metres. The size and shape of the area are designed to blend in naturally with the existing landscape. Turf was stripped away to a depth of 5-10cm, and the ground lightly scarified to create a clear seed-bed. Seed was hand-sown, then raked and trodden in. The carefully calculated amounts of seed (30% flower to 70% grass, slightly more flower than recommended, but we want a good show!) are guaranteed to be from native, wild populations in the UK, and the mixture consists of 26 species of flower and 8 species of grass. Not all the seed was used, ¼ being retained to fill gaps later on, which may prove very helpful if it proves the flood did wash some away.

If all goes well, this part of Oak Meadow will have more colour and variety, which in time will transform the whole.