NEWSLETTER

No. 25

AUTUMN &

WINTER 2013

AN AUDIT OF WHAT FRIENDS DO

The Association's objects are to develop & enhance Meadow Park, East Leake:

a) as a place of recreation and enjoyment for the general public

b) as an educational resource for people of all ages

c) as a conservation area to benefit and increase the diversity of wildlife

d) as a small-scale centre for recording and research.

e) as an area for fresh air and exercise.

The above appears in the Friends of Meadow Park's constitution. As it's well over a decade since we signed up to it, it is perhaps time to see whether and how our activities measure up to what is prescribed.

A Thanks to generous grants and donations, we have improved the paths over the majority of the park, which is now largely accessible except after heavy rain. More variety of planting, especially in the arboretum, has made for a more interesting visual experience for the visitor. We have installed benches and picnic tables (and plenty of waste-bins).
Frequent litter-picking and stream-clearing help to keep the place pleasant.

B Guided walks in the summer - sadly not very well attended - have introduced visitors to our birds, trees, wildflowers and butterflies. It has proved difficult to develop projects with the schools, but we know that teachers and leaders of the uniformed organisations use the park as an educational resource. A "What to look for" leaflet was a very early initiative, followed by one describing a couple of walks. Most recently, two academic scientist Friends have compiled a detailed leaflet to help visitors to the arboretum get the most out of their trip (available at the parish office and library). After his visit last May, the Green Flag assessor suggested we might create a nature trail (education by stealth!), which is certainly worthy of consideration, and we are also hoping to benefit soon from the advice of Lynn Victor, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's education manager.
The arboretum is in itself an educational resource. It was costly to install, but its value, which is only just beginning to be apparent as the trees establish themselves, should last for generations.

C We regularly undertake a variety of work loosely defined as woodland management, such as hedge–laying and coppicing, which both improves the trees and provides better cover for low-nesting birds. A rolling programme to try to recreate the lowland meadow type of flower population that these fields would once have had, by sowing appropriate wild seed combined with reducing the heavy growth of dock and ragwort, has added colour but, more importantly, has led to a marked increase in insect life, especially butterflies (and by implication the food chain it forms part of).

D Two substantial pieces of professional research have recently been produced:
"The Geology of Meadow Park" by David Bridge
"Ecological & Physico-chemical Investigation 2012" by Ian Morrissey. Copies of these are available on request from the FMP secretary.
Ann Weekley's recording of wildflowers over many years revealed fascinating fluctuations of species, but also a steady numerical increase, while Kevin Gibbons and Brian Johnson's 2013 collection of butterfly photos and data is attractive as well as valuable evidence of thriving communities.

E The park is a natural "green lung" for the village and is seldom empty of people.

The Friends are always looking for new ways to meet the five objectives. Please come forward with your ideas, and especially with your skills to help the park make even more progress

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, November 2013

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (ALAN BARLOW)

My memory of Meadow Park for 2013 is one of surprises … pleasant surprises.

This all started just before Christmas last year. Matt Youdale from Arch Communications came forward with a most generous donation which was then matched by the Parish and Borough Councils and also East Leake Town Lands Trust. We found ourselves in a position to complete our path regeneration programme. We were afraid that all the previous good work would have been destroyed by last winter's floods. Not so, and come spring the meadows sprang to life and gave an excellent showing of wildflowers. Previous years we had sown quite a lot of Hay Rattle and this is now doing well in Meadow Park. It weakens surrounding grasses and allows flowers to raise their heads above the canopy. This in turn attracted insects and butterflies and provided some rare and welcome sightings which will be mentioned in a separate report. We have received some excellent help with our osier bed and 2014 should see some willow structures in place. Picnic benches have been refurbished and Kingston Brook is looking reasonably clear of rubbish.

We again applied for a Community Green Flag Award and after an in-depth 3 hour assessment we are able to fly our flag outside the Parish Office for another year.

Our enthusiasm is challenged by the endless problem of littering and dog fouling. I have calculated that at least 20% of the volunteer hours this past year have been spent in rectifying the effects of unauthorised activities in the park; damage to benches, clearing the brook and dismantling a den.

Looking forward I think we now have a good infrastructure in the park and we do get a lot of appreciative comments. We have an excellent relationship with the Parish Council and have secured some funding for ongoing maintenance. This was virtually impossible to raise by other means. We look forward to working with the Youth Parish Councillors next year.

Chris Packham said recently that one of the rarest animals seen in the UK countryside is the human child. We all work to make Meadow Park a safe and interesting environment. I would like to see more young people appreciating this resource.

From SECRETARY'S REPORT (TREVOR JONES)

Current membership stands at 111. This includes 8 new members, but total membership is 10 down from last year. Some of the loss relates to people leaving the village, some finally retiring and a very small number to the increased membership fee.

Membership drives in the past have attracted a few, but they did not stay long term. I am not sure that we could attract many more members without altering the nature of our organisation. There are two aspects of FMP – (1) interest in nature and (2) public duty in maintaining and improving the Park. With regard to the latter, perhaps people who pay their taxes feel, with some justification, that they do not need to additionally contribute time and effort. My big worry is the absence of young members. An explanation offered is that modern children are too busy. A junior division might work if membership was regarded as "cool" and there was an enthusiast to run it.

If we had a formal committee, we would have a flower specialist, tree specialist, plant pathologist, mammal expert, safety expert, possibly a psychologist etc, replaced when one leaves. A committee composed of volunteers is not balanced.

Ann Weekley spent three hours every month for the ten years 2003/2012 recording flowers in bloom in Meadow Park. A total of 132 species were recorded, although not all appeared in any one year. She has had to discontinue the work and this leaves a gap.

Ann's records provide a benchmark for the future. Two other benchmarks produced this year are David Bridge's "Geology of Meadow Park" and Ian Morrissey's "Kingston Brook, Meadow Park, East Leake – Ecological and Physico-chemical Investigation 2012", a repeat of his 2002 survey. These are both quality documents. David Bridge is not a Member: help sometimes comes from unexpected sources. Ian is a Member; he grew up in the village and works as a principal environmental scientist.

There could well be other expertise in the village. However, nothing can be achieved without enthusiastic practical Members.

Contacts for FRIENDS OF MEADOW PARK
c/o The Parish Office, 45 Main Street,
East Leake, LE12 6PF
tel: 852217 (weekday mornings)
email: meadowpark@eastleake.net
also see the village website:
www.east-leake.co.uk (Amenities)

TREASURER'S REPORT YEAR ENDING 31/10/13 (ANDY DENKER)

2012/13 Proved to be another exceptional year for FMP financially. The increase in subscriptions to £3/year led to Membership income rising by £103 to £597 but it was a further very generous donation of £500 from a local benefactor – Arch Communications, plus three further amounts of £500 from East Leake Town Lands Trust, East Leake Parish Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council [community fund] which raised the total donations to £2012. Sales were again down on last year - £50, and due to not taking part in the carnival there was no income from fundraising. The remaining Grant was received from RBC [wildflower seeds] totalling £192.80. Overall income was a grand total of £2852.80

Expenditure at £3528.74 was high this year because of the completion of the main project carried over from last year- the path upgrade: £2500.

Although expenditure this year was in excess of receipts [-£675.94] the opening balance of £791.89 allowed a total of £115.95 to be carried forward for 2013/14.

There are several projects in the pipeline for 2013/2014 which require funds but there is work going on in the background to raise the funds for these

These accounts were audited by Lesley Bancroft [East Leake Parish Clerk].

From NESTBOX REPORT (ERIC BRYSON)

Due to wet conditions, only a limited survey was carried out, on 9/11/2013. 11 boxes were inspected.

Of these, four had been used, including one open-fronted box that had an unusual nest in it - domed with lots of pigeon feathers and long grass; this could have been chiff chaff.

Three were vandalised - one had just the back plate left, others had their roof prised off! Another was repaired on the spot. Four had not been used.

The remainder could not be reached because it was too wet to climb the trees.

Box 4 was rebuilt and sited just opposite York Close (Bateman Road). Box 8 (E side of Sheepwash Brook) was taken home for repair.

We could do with some more replacement boxes – perhaps a work session could be devoted to this, early in the year before nesting starts.

From ARBORETUM REPORT (MOLLIE JACQUES).

The trees are now mostly looking healthy and are putting on growth, but the beech has been a problem. It favours slightly acidic soil (ours is on the clay-ey side) and has to be on a well-drained site – even without last year's floods, the area of Gibson's Field where it was planted tends to be damp. We have lost two specimens since 2011 but, because it is an important tree, it seemed worth trying again. However, specimen No. 3 has been planted on the highest ground available, not far from the Bateman Road entrance. Another casualty was the elm. Dutch Elm Disease has been known for more than a century, and the tree in the arboretum appears totally dead, but it has thrown up two or three clumps of suckers from unaffected roots. Apparently these, too, will become diseased and are unlikely to survive more than ten years or so. Meanwhile, work is being done to breed resistant cultivars, so maybe a healthy replacement tree will one day be available.

The arboretum originally contained 31 trees, but two more are shortly to be added - alder and black poplar.

There are three initiatives to report:

A leaflet to help a visitor get the most out of a walk through the arboretum. Pick one up at the parish office or the library.

A "Tree Sponsorship" scheme to raise funds to go towards future maintenance costs of the arboretum.

Quick Response Coding (QR) to enable visitors to access instant information about the trees. Andrew Sandford is organising this project.

THE MEADOW PARK ARBORETUM

** SPONSOR A TREE **

For just £10 you can sign the illustrated ARBORETUM BOOK, and add any dedication you choose.

The book is kept at the parish office, and is available for you to look at any weekday morning.
If necessary, phone 852217 or email meadowpark@eastleake.net to make other arrangements.

BOX FILES

containing all sorts of information about Meadow Park, its past, present and future, and especially about the Friends of Meadow Park, are now held at East Leake Library and also at the Parish Office.

Please feel free to browse - it's YOUR park, after all!

AUTUMN ACTIVITIES

September

We had a good turnout with 11 members present. Nine spent the morning taking down and digging up the enemy dogwood in Hall Field - as can be seen above, it looks a bit like hide and seek.

The other two took a walk around the park cutting back the overhangs on the paths and collecting several bags of rubbish

October

An intrepid 7 volunteers turned up to complete a variety of tasks.

- The dogwood in Gibsons Field took what was described as "a bit of hammering" .
- The wild flower patch in Oak Meadow was strimmed (it was not mowed at the normal time, to give the new plants more chance to set seed)
- Two holes were dug in the Arboretum ready for planting (a) another replacement beech tree and (b) an alder which was missed off the original selection

November

We were a party of ten, and managed:

- Our annual bird-box inspection (except for a couple where the conditions were too slippery for our ladder) and put up a new box.
- Preliminary work on the next hedge laying task in Hall Field, along with path inspection.
- Litter picking (with the disturbing find of an axe near the railway arch)

December

There were six volunteers, 3 with hedge-laying experience, 3 without, and the task was to start laying the line of hawthorn/ash on the south side of Hall Field.

Conrad reported: "Things went well, and in 2 hours we laid just over half the area cleared in November. Because of the sparse nature of some parts, we dropped some hawthorn from the thicket behind to bulk up the hedge with living material."

A further session is planned for January.

Volunteer Hours worked in 2013

We had eleven regular Saturday morning sessions in the year (second Saturday every month except August) doing the sort of things mentioned above, and notched up 215.5 hours' work.

In addition to these, Friends contributed 87.5 hours of unscheduled work - that they admitted to. We know a lot more gets done quietly, for which all park users are very grateful.

Tasks included laying and repairing a land-drain, coppicing willows, flail-cutting scrub, arboretum maintenance, tree-planting, pulling ragwort, painting picnic benches, surveying paths, mapping the arboretum, sowing wildflower seed

etc, etc, etc….

THAT GIVES A KNOWN TOTAL FOR THE YEAR OF 303 HOURS

ACTIVITY DAYS FOR SPRING 2014

Saturday 11 January

Hedge-laying to complete the stretch in Hall Field that was started last month

Saturday 8 February

Scrub clearance (Hall Field)

Coppicing trees in Lagoon Field

Saturday 8 March

Cutting & digging dogwood

Saturday 12 April

"Spring Clean Day"

As always, meet 9.50am at the depot behind the Parish Office. Tools provided, but please wear tough clothing.

Why not make it YOUR New Year resolution to attend some of these sessions?