NEWSLETTER
No. 27

AUTUMN &
WINTER 2014

Friends of Meadow Park

Green Flag Award

DO FIELDS NEED FRIENDS?

When the Kirk family gave the land we know as Meadow Park to Rushcliffe Borough Council to be a public amenity, it came with a considerable pot of money. Some of this was used to reinstate the park's bridges and plant a few copses, but the funds were not ring-fenced exclusively for the park. They could be spent on any village leisure project, which at that time (the mid-1990s) meant only one thing - the swimming pool that the public had been demanding for years. This was only achievable if a large cash contribution could be found locally.... The rest, as they say, is history.

The Borough Council set up a basic management regime for a simple public open space. Residents were invited to give it a name, and they put their collective finger on the dual nature of the place - it's a park for leisure use, but it's also residual meadow land from its farming days. And that could have been that.

There was a dilemma, however. How could a simple, low-budget approach be reconciled with the obligation to nature conservation that the Borough Council was committed to even then, and which costs money to follow? It's a problem shared by most statutory authorities, with multiple demands on limited resources; they devote what seems a proportionate amount of the public's money to any given scheme, and if enough people want more and are enthusiastic, then a "Friends of..." group is probably the most productive way forward.

One school of thought reckons that just opening the park was enough, and that the Friends are a bunch of meddling eccentrics who have been given the run of a giant play-ground. In that case, only minimal maintenance would have been carried out, and some areas would have rapidly reverted to scrub (as was proved when Hall Field was experimentally left fallow).

However, having a Friends' group has opened up the park's potential in several ways. FMP can attract funding for improvements like the surfacing of footpaths, and for development projects such as the arboretum; its volunteer workforce carries out woodland management jobs like hedge-laying or coppicing; some members can offer expertise as botanists, for example, or IT specialists or teachers or basket-makers. Friends play a direct role in helping the Borough Council address the targets set in the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy (this is an interesting document that you can find in the Meadow Park pages on www.east-leake.co.uk).

As the park is a multi-purpose space, focused planning is not as easy as it would be in a specialised nature reserve, but biodiversity levels are definitely on the up, with more species year on year of both wildflowers and butterflies. The Curator of Biology at the Natural History Museum, Wollaton Hall, Dr Sheila Wright, led our first "Moth Watch" in August, which added some useful data for comparison in the future, while this spring one of our members will be undertaking a breeding bird count, the start of another annual check list. Finally, we hope to follow the successful "Bee Worlds" with a specialised habitat corner for butterflies.

The beauty of all these enterprises is the positive impact they have on how the park looks. The pictures on the left suggest that fields are definitely better off if they have Friends, but they could do with more - **please** spread the word.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, November 2014

From Chairman's Report (Alan Barlow)

Firstly, thanks to all those who came and got stuck in this year with the physical side of managing Meadow Park. Some who are unable to give support in that way do so by virtue of their annual subscription. Thank you all. We were rewarded with a Green Flag again. This year the assessment was by a 'mystery shopper' so we have no idea when or who came to conduct the audit.

We acquired grants from Rushcliffe Community Support Scheme and East Midlands Airport. Securing these funds can be challenging and time consuming, with application forms of Byzantine complexity. However, the outcomes are there for all to see — the arboretum, paths and information boards.

The committee has been busy and especially the secretary and treasurer need recognition. Our publicity officer, Mollie Jacques, is kept busy compiling news letters and suchlike. She also helped create the artwork for the new arboretum plinth. The educational walks in early summer are always successful and the new initiative with Lantern Lane School is working well. This is their Forest Schools project. Some of us built a willow structure with the children back in the spring but it was short-lived. In spite of being in a prominent and visible place it was dismantled and vandalised within 10 days. John Roulstone already has plans for a more robust creation. I look forward to being a part of that team.

We now have a ring-fenced fund for maintenance and replacement in the arboretum, thanks to the tree sponsorship scheme launched last year. The trees are becoming established and I think we can be justifiably proud of that piece of work.

By the time of this AGM I will have had a meeting with the Parish Council to explore new ways in which we can work together. The groundsmen have expressed a wish to be more involved with some of our initiatives and this is to be encouraged. Our teams are getting smaller each year (mostly through age) and we find it hard to recruit, so must consider carefully which tasks we can reasonably take on with our cadre of helpers.

Looking forward to next year; an even better show of wildflowers is to be expected along with new viewings of butterflies and moths. We have met again with Trent Valley Internal Drainage Board and I see opportunities opening up for us in relation to Kingston Brook. Great Central Railway is on our radar and there are plans for work on the embankment ... just when I don't know. Lantern Lane is in the vanguard of using Meadow Park as an educational asset. It will be interesting to see if other schools follow on.

From Secretary's Report (Trevor Jones)

Membership stands at 93 (gained 3 and lost 21). Total membership has never been more than a small percentage of East Leake's population, but a few people can have a major influence on developments in the park. Subscription income used to be crucial to our activities, but we are now independent. We are not, however, complacent on membership numbers and are open to suggestions. But a few new members of our age group will not radically alter things, and long term, it is crucial that we attract younger members. One quantum leap advance in the past year is the involvement of Lantern Lane School, including their forest camping initiative. Other schools in the village have yet to show interest.

Becoming secretary soon after joining FMP did not automatically make me all knowledgeable. It was not easy to get information without troubling other people. There are three basic sources of information. The first is our straightforward constitution. The second is the Management Plan of 2011. The third is the minutes. These may appear lengthy, but I attempt to be comprehensive and maintain continuity. Earlier this year I set up a box file in East Leaked library which contains the documents mentioned.

There were reports of illness in dogs in the summer, associated with Kingston Brook. Any problem must be defined and, if there isn't a pattern, we must avoid unjustified scares. I have drawn up a questionnaire for completion should cases be reported next summer.

Yet again, Alan must be thanked for continuing to work hard, set clear objectives and lead from the front.

Don't forget the ARBORETUM

TREE SPONSORSHIP SCHEME

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.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, November 2014

From Treasurer's Report (Andy Denker)

Although membership subscriptions fell by £100 to £497, generous donations from members and from the wider village community, to general funds and to the Arboretum Sponsorship Fund, gave us a total of £900.

Grants from Rushcliffe Borough Council and from MAG PLC [East Midlands Airport] of £350.76 and £100 respectively raised the total income to £1350.76. Overall income, including the starting balance from 2013, totalled £1466.71

Expenditure at £645.62 was substantially lower this year, as no major projects were undertaken. Most of it was spent on the purchase of tools and equipment.

A sum of £821.09 is carried forward for 2014/15. As the Arboretum Sponsorship is ring fenced for use in the Arboretum only this gives a split of £481.09 to general funds and £340 to the Arboretum.

There is one major expenditure in the pipeline, namely the purchase of a notice board giving all the details of the trees in the Arboretum. This will cost £700 + 20% VAT, a total of £840. A grant covering the majority of this amount has been promised by MAG PLC.

From other Reports

WILDFLOWERS (Ann Weekley)

No specific flower count this year, but some memorable moments.

This year's Bee Patch, in Bateman Field, was a mass of yellow corn marigolds and blue cornflowers among other less showy species. Last year's Bee Patch was pink and white this year, with red campions and ox-eye daisies; yellow bird's foot trefoil and lady's bedstraw and white hedge bedstraw added to the mix. The "ribbon" in Oak Meadow was also a delight, with a display of red poppies, white ox-eye daisies and blue cornflowers, quite patriotic!

Probably the most spectacular proliferation has been that of the yellow rattle. First seen on a small scale in Little Meadow, it is now widespread and doing the job we hoped it would, weakening the dominant rye grass due to its semi-parasitic nature on the grass roots, so giving wild flower seeds at least a chance of flourishing.

It was a particularly good year for cowslips, buttercups, both varieties of cranesbill, and also taller plants such as spear thistle and teasel. One newcomer was spotted, the devil's bit scabious (a deeper, more intense blue than the commoner field scabious) Unfortunately, last year's newcomer, meadow saxifrage, has not been seen this year.

Who knows what we might find next year.

BUTTERFLIES (Kevin Gibbons & Brian Johnson)

This year twenty-two visits were conducted from March through to September. Each visit followed the same route and in similar weather conditions (mainly sunny with little wind). This method of recording aids in achieving a consistent and accurate estimation of the number of butterflies and species year on year. The route is circular, approximately 1.5 miles and covers most areas of Meadow Park to ensure all butterfly habitats are observed, and takes an average of one hour to complete.

No new species sightings to report for this year.

The Essex Skipper recorded last year for the first time was also recorded this year, so we can be fairly confident that this is now a resident butterfly. A total of twenty-three species of butterflies have been recorded since monitoring started in 2005, of these we can be fairly sure of recording at least twenty species year on year if the habitat is maintained.

ARBORETUM (Mollie Jacques)

Two new trees (alder and black poplar) were planted this year, making a total of 33 specimens, probably the limit in the space available.

A new beech tree (No 3) is doing well in an elevated site near the Bateman Road entrance, but two other trees look sick and are being carefully watched. These are the downy birch, and the wild plum, which in time may need to be replaced. Our sessile oak is about to be replaced, as it appears not to be a pure specimen (probably a hybrid with a pedunculated or English oak, to which it is closely related). We wanted to show two distinct species, so, already having an excellent pedunculated oak, we decided to purchase a new sessile.

The sponsorship scheme, mentioned elsewhere, produces funds of long-term value as and when maintenance work becomes necessary. In the shorter term, children at Lantern Lane School researched and designed junior leaflets (available in the parish office and library, alongside the more scientific leaflets we put out last year).

Finally, the attaching of QR tags reported last year is still a work in progress, and we are awaiting delivery of the new information board the Treasurer referred to.

P.S. The board now installed beside the footpath in Bateman Field.

NESTBOXES (Eric Bryson)

We are now down to 18 boxes. 2 of the originals seem to have disappeared without trace! We also have a willow nest (not used) and a bat box (not used).

2 boxes could not be reached and 2 others were without a roof. 9 of the remainder had been used - which is a good percentage.

Almost all the occupants had been tits (whatever the style of box). There was evidence of squirrel damage in one, and a dead bird in another. One containing the remains of an old nest was in use by a wood mouse.

Some repair work was carried out in situ.

AUTUMN ACTIVITIES

September

We had a nice morning in the park!

There were 8 of us and we cut back encroaching overgrowth affecting paths on the south side of Oak Meadow, through the copse in Gibson's Field and alongside the copse at the eastern border of Gibson's Field, between the seat and alongside Kevin's Boulevard (i.e. the diagonal track across Bateman Field).

We also opened up the desire path on the eastern border of Bateman Field.

Litter-picking, of course—two large bags full.

October

There were a respectable 8 members present, including one new volunteer, always welcome.

We undertook two tasks, namely our annual nest box inspection and the continued clearance and tidying up of the footpath adjacent to Bateman Road

A squatter mouse being evicted from this box

November

There were just five volunteers today.

Four of us coppiced 11 of the hazel trees in Gibson's Field. These respond well to coppicing, growing vigorously from the cut base to produce strong stems (and plentiful nuts for our grateful wildlife!)

One went on a litter pick, and found the usual nasty assortment of rubbish..

December

There were 7 of us this month.

We're getting reasonably proficient now, even with difficult field boundaries.

Most spent the morning hedge-laying along the south side of Hall Field, while one picked litter.

This included clearing drug packets and beer cans from the furthest railway tunnel and demolishing a den in a copse in Bateman Field, where quite a bit of destruction had been caused in its construction.

VOLUNTEER HOURS WORKED IN 2014

We had eleven regular Saturday morning sessions in the year (second Saturday in the month except August) doing the sort of things mentioned above, and altogether notched up 192.75 hours' work.

In addition, Friends recorded 146.5 hours of unscheduled work. We know a lot more gets done on the quiet, for which all park users should be very grateful.

Tasks included repairing a land-drain (again), coppicing willows & building the ill-fated willow structure, planting & watering new trees in the arboretum, pulling ragwort, strimming around the new wildflower beds, sowing additional wildflower seed, wildlife recording, etc.

THAT GIVES A KNOWN TOTAL FOR THE YEAR OF 339.25 HOURS

REMAINING ACTIVITY DAYS FOR SPRING 2015

Saturday 14 March

Digging "Bee World" extension in Bateman Field

Coppicing hazel trees

Saturday 11 April

Cutting/pulling docks in Oak Meadow .

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

Please try to get along - we'd love to see you there.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

1. One of our Green Flag assessors suggested we might create a Nature Trail to interest our younger visitors
2. It may be feasible to revive an earlier idea to install an exercise course, or "Trim Trak"

Please let us have your views on these - plus any ideas you might have for adding value to the park.