

Chairman's Report 2010

The past year has been an eventful, interesting and testing experience for the Chairman and committee of Friends of Belper Parks. These are some of the highlights of the year.

The wildflower meadow

The wildflower meadow phase 1 produced very few of the cornfield wildflowers we added to the seed mix, that were so prolific in the summer of 2008. Last summer there was a good crop of the wildflowers that were probably once present in the Parks.

This has been greatly appreciated by the local wildlife. There have been a greater range of birds in the meadow, which was visited far more frequently by birds in general, and particularly good to see the return of the crows, the arrival of Bull Finches. On one summer's evening the Chairman and Secretary noted five Small Copper butterflies in this part of the meadow, plus a sixth Small Copper at the top of the hill on the south side of the brook. By comparison, in all previous years we have only ever seen an individual Small Copper on the white dead-nettle that lines the path from the car park to the brook.

Due to a lot of rain making it impossible for the farmer to harrow the west end of the meadow ready for sowing in the autumn of 2008, it was "raked" over and sown in the spring of last year. This end of the wildflower meadow produced a marvelous crop of cornfield wildflowers similar to that at the other part of the meadow in 2008. One lady came to our stall at the Christmas farmer's market to thank us for the marvelous display of flowers, and said she kept on going to her sitting room window to check that the flowers were really there, and that she hadn't simply dreamt about them.

Bluebell Walk

Following much work by the 'Friends' removing Spanish bluebells from the triangle by the Mill Lane entrance to the Parks, and the removal of many holly saplings from the oak woodland. We held two conducted tours of the bluebell walk for the public. Six people came and not only enjoyed the event, but said they had learnt far more being on a conducted tour than they would have done just walking around following the trail with the printed leaflets.

Horses and Bikers in the Parks 2009

Our long standing campaign to discourage bikers using the Parks has been very successful. The only sign of the Parks being abused in this way was once or twice we saw lights that were moving a bit to steadily for them to be produced by a walker with a torch. A consequence of the campaign is that having involved our MP who wrote to the Chief Constable of Derbyshire and the Chief Executive of AVBC, we now have very good contacts with the Police who have also visited all the stables in the area to remind them of the horse riders of the law, whenever we have reported seeing people on horseback in the Parks.

Events

The major event of the year was the Kite Making and Flying event. This took an inordinate amount of time to achieve due to do the paperwork have to fill in for the Landscape Services Dept. of AVBC, to be able to use one of their sites for a public event. We were given a donation of £600 by the Derbyshire Community Foundation, which covered the cost of Fleet Arts, who taught two classes at Herbert Strutt Primary School, one class at the Sure Start Children's Centre and another at the Whitemoor Centre, plus attending on the day and making several more kites for children who saw what was going on and decided they wanted to join in. The donors commented that "The panel felt that the application presented by the Friends was excellent and offered something different and creative to engage young people and other local residents. They were confident that the activity would support us with our aim of encouraging people to utilize local green spaces for health and leisure. They also liked the fact that "the bid was focused on a particular area within Belper

allowing the project to have a more structured feel and aim". The panel members were aware of Parks Estate and considered it a good area to deliver such a positive community event."

The air had been very still for the previous two Saturdays (12th & 19th September) with hardly a breath of wind. Thursday 24th and Friday 25th were even stiller than the previous two Saturdays, when there was no chance of flying a kite. As there was just enough wind at 9 a.m. to flutter the two flags on either side of the rec. we decided to risk having the event. The day did have the advantage of being a warm and then sunny morning which helped in drawing in some of the children from Parks estate who had not made kites at school. The children expended a lot of energy getting their kites to fly as did some of the dads. One lad went home and fetched his own kite and another bought the kite he had won at school for making the best decorated kite in the two kite making classes. Another lad decided to tie his onto the back of his bike to see what happened.

A very pleasant morning was had by all, including the Friends who had job of acting as stewards for the event. We had the use of the toilets in the Children's Centre, their caretaker and his wife came to open up the centre and then stayed for most of the morning as they really enjoyed watching the children and mostly dads enjoying themselves flying their kites. The St Johns Ambulance First Aider had a very relaxed morning with his wife and son, as he fortunately had nothing to do.

The other event of the year was the Farmers Market in December. We made a profit of £113, which is similar to the profit in previous years. It was a dry, cold but occasionally sunny day.

Wildlife Border

The wildlife border again produced a glorious display of wildflowers for much of the summer. The border was visited by a large number of bees of at least five different species, and a lot more butterflies than last year. The last butterfly seen on the border was a Comma on the 6th November.

Relations with AVBC

The following comment was made in the Acting Chairman's Report at the last AGM. "It is therefore essential that the incoming Chairman and Committee make strenuous efforts to restore a friendly and viable relationship with AVBC and its officers as soon as possible."

I'm pleased to say that we are doing just that!

Our course was made plain, once Julian Townsend the Director of Environmental Services, did what he should have done two years previous and sent us a copy of the Council's complaints procedure. In the mean time we collected a number of negative responses from Landscape Services Department. These caused the Chairman to ask for a meeting with the Cabinet member for Landscape Services, and found that the Leader of the Council and John Nelson also wanted to attend! They were extremely surprised to hear that we only want to work within the Green Flag Award and the Belper Parks LNR Management Plans. When it became obvious that the most senior of our Borough Councilors were not making a lot of progress with their employees, we went to the final level of the complaints procedure which was to take our complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman decided there was a case to pursue and is currently seeking resolution of our complaints with the Senior Executives of the Council.

The group put in a total of 340 volunteer hours since the last AGM.