



THE BYTHAMS WOODLAND TRUST
(Registered Charity 1100816)

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2013/14

Introduction

I am very pleased to be able to introduce the tenth Chairman's Report for the Bythams Woodland Trust (BWT). I can only cover a very brief synopsis of the huge amount of work that has gone on behind the scenes, on our many working weekends during the past year and to welcome the continuing increase in visitors as one of the main success stories.

Constitution

There have been no major constitutional issues this year and it is pleasing to note that the one we have in place is still working well. The annual returns to the Charity Commission are up to date and were completed on time. New Committee co-options were made at the AGM in 2013 and all of these have made a positive contribution to the work of the Trust.

The Management Committee met on seven occasions, including the AGM.

Funding

It was a relatively quiet year with respect to fund raising though we were able to benefit from two late funds from the Community Spaces programme whose purpose was to celebrate the big grant we got a couple of years ago.

We were very pleased to receive donations from the Castle and Little Bytham Parish Councils and the Careby and Aunby Parish Meeting. We also received a very generous grant from the Castle Bytham Fair Committee. All such contributions are vital to help with the day to day running costs of the Spinney, without which, our financial position would be significantly weaker.

Site Works

The main focus of work was very much ensuring that the new equipment is maintained in a good condition as a result of the increase in use by visitors. The BWT work schedule during the year remained demanding in terms of general maintenance - mowing, strimming, leaf clearing and gleaning fallen branches, coppicing, chipping and general tidying, building new

steps. The sensory garden always requires a high degree of maintenance - mainly planting and weeding by hand. A lot of work was done to create some new rabbit proof fencing and install new gates, which will make the garden more secure and look a lot better.

The general work on the Meadow is very weather dependent, but it does appear that our seed planting during the past couple of years is working. There is a broad range of grass species appearing, but managing the thistles remains a big challenge. However, the 'topping' and hedge cutting arrangement with John Turner has worked well.

Spinney 10th Birthday Celebrations - September 14th

Arguably, this was the highlight of the year, held on a beautiful autumn afternoon. With the grant received from Community Spaces, we were able to organise a really great fun day to which more than 500 people turned up. Jo Hammond and Liz Page organised some fantastic enviro-activities, the Jolly Bodgeys of Sherwood Forest exhibited their rural crafts and skills, Julie Fulton had a craft stall and we had music all afternoon, with the ever excellent Tin Pigeons as the headline act. A bar and barbecue, and other refreshments were provided by FOBS.

It was an brilliant celebration of our first ten years and on the basis of this, bring on the next ten!

Tree Dressing and Hedge Laying

No sooner than we had held our birthday celebrations, then we were invited to apply for further Community Spaces funding. We chose to have our own Tree Dressing event as part of National Tree Week on 7th December - which was another great day all round. Jo Hammond created a wonderful array of christmassy things to put on the tree of your choice (and also to take away) while FOBS provided hot soup, rolls and lots of cakes. Nearly 400 people attended - and it seemed that the adults were having more fun than the children!

For some time we have wanted to lay the top hedge of the Meadow, and this grant enabled us to use the skills of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust (David Van Dome and his volunteers) and also Richard Machin to lead a series of hedge-laying workshops either side of christmas and the new year. We opened this up to the wider community and we have been able to engage some new volunteer helpers who have continued to support the Spinney. To our credit, we actually laid more hedge than we had planned and we now have the skills to do the rest of the meadow later in the year.

Publicity and Promotion

Judging by the numbers of people now visiting the Spinney, our publicity and promotion would appear to be working. Word has got around about the Spinney and throughout the year there has been a substantial increase in visitors - on some days the car park and access

road were completely full!. One item in particular was an excellent article in the Stamford Living magazine, courtesy of Sheena Harvey.

The BWT organized a promotional stall at the Bythams School May Fete which was very well received and we also had our stall at the Corby Glen Sheep Fair in October, which was fun to attend.

Gavin Pye has updated our website at www.bythamspinney.co.uk. We are also on Facebook on www.facebook.com/bythamsSpinney. We have investigated how best we might optimize voluntary donations through <http://www.charitygiving.co.uk/bythamswoodland>.

Health and Safety

This remains a key priority and a continuing requirement of our insurance arrangements. The Spinney is a natural wild woodland and there will always be an element of adventure in what we do.

We had a ROSPA Play Area Safety Inspection Report in September and it is very pleasing to note that in all areas, there was nothing at a high risk. However, to be fair, there were a few actions that were identified as needing remediation, but nothing major and all things that we have been able to rectify..

Future Plans

Now that our major funding application to the Community Spaces programme has been completed, the future is one of taking stock of what we have and what we have the capacity to do. High quality, ongoing site maintenance and upkeep will be critical. Similarly, the Meadow is likely to remain a challenge and must be seen as a long term project still to come to fruition. We have discussed a new substantial grant application to one of the major funders for improved upkeep of the site and the possible installation of some compost loos!

The BWT is always looking for more friends and newcomers to join us to help with what we are trying to achieve for local people. If you have some spare time, or know of someone who does, then please do come and join us!

And of course, while the adults are working, the children who come down to the site take part in some of the most fantastic play experiences that nature can offer - adventurous, dirty, rough, creative, destructive, re-building, active, physical, healthy - the sort of play opportunities many of us probably had twenty or so years ago but sadly do not seem so prevalent today. You only have to look at their faces at the end of an afternoon to see how much fun they all have!

Thanks

There are so many people who deserve to be thanked for the tremendous time and effort that they have put in week in, week out. All the Management Committee have put in a great

deal of work using their different skills and experience to ensure that the BWT is in a fit organisational state to do what it wants to do. So thanks to Judith, Sam, Gavin, Simon, Luke, Gillian, James and Thomas.

We have had some new volunteers who have been a great help - Dennis, Richard, Simon - plus it has been really good to have a new cohort of Duke of Edinburgh students - so a warm thanks to all those who have helped out.

We have received fantastic support from FOBS, especially Claire Watson, and also the new teachers at the Bythams School who have really taken a shine to the Spinney, and our working relationships are now really very strong.

Thanks to the Willoughby Arms and Castle Inn for allowing us to use their premises for our meetings, the Police who keep an eye out for us, The Glenside News for regularly publishing our news and stories, our District Councillor Ibis Channell, Trevor Harris, who services all our mechanical equipment and Tim Rasell, who advises on plants and good horticulture tips. We are also grateful for assistance from students at New College, Stamford, who helped with general maintenance during the early summer.

We are also very appreciative of our funders - the local Parish Councils, the Castle Bytham Fair Committee, and the Big Lottery Fund/Groundwork UK for their financial award as part of the Community Spaces programme.

Finally, our heartfelt thanks must go to the local community and especially the children who use the site for their play, adventure or simple relaxation and without whose presence, support and interest, the whole thing would not be worthwhile.

Dr Patrick Candler, Chairman of BWT
09.06.14

