



THE BYTHAMS WOODLAND TRUST
(Registered Charity 1100816)

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2012/13

Introduction

I am very pleased to be able to introduce the ninth 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 big 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 2012 and all of these have made a considerable 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 as we were still completing the spend on the Big Lottery Grants received in 2011, with final payments being made for the slide and also the Sustainability Grant.

We were very pleased to receive a continuing payment from Careby Parish Meeting though we did not make a specific request to the Parish Councils during the year. Any such contribution is critical to help with the day to day running costs of the Spinney, without which, our financial position would be significantly weaker.

The Castle Bytham Fair Committee awarded £250, which is gratefully received.

A number of applications were made for smaller grants - Santander, Coop - but these were unsuccessful.

Site Works

The main focus of work was very much ensuring that the new equipment was maintained in a good condition as a result of the huge 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 requires a high degree of maintenance - mainly weeding by hand and work was started on putting in a rabbit proof fence surround.

The work on the Meadow is very weather dependent and only time will tell if our seed planting has worked. We were very fortunate in getting some big round bales from a local farmer and on a very hot July day Gavin and I, with the help of John Sharpe and his loader, managed to unroll these down the slope, ready for our team of volunteers to and then spread them out a few days later.

We have agreed a 'topping' and hedge cutting arrangement with John Turner which is most helpful.

Spinney Open Day - September 22nd

Arguably, this was the highlight of the year, held on a beautiful autumn day. It had been some years since we had organised a community open day, but with the funding from the Sustainability Grant, we were able to put on an excellent event. More than 400 visitors enjoyed music from Tourdion, a bar and barbecue, environmental workshops by Jo Hammond and Dave Clarke with teas and other refreshments provided by FOBS.

In many ways, this more than compensated for the formal opening of the new play equipment which was held on July 6th. We had planned a big event involving the whole Bythams School, but because the weather was so bad - it rained all day - in the end a few hardy Year 6s and teachers turned up to do a photoshoot. I don't think I have ever seen such a bedraggled bunch of children and governors - and my thanks to them for making the effort.

Links with School and Community Groups

It is most pleasing to see that the BWT continues its links with the Bythams Primary School and also FOBS (Chair, Clare Watson). The school is making good use of the Spinney at different times of the year so that children can experience the changing shape of nature at first hand.

The Spinney still encourages organizations like the Guides, Brownies and Rainbows to use the site at times of their choosing. The Spinney continues to provide work experience for Duke of Edinburgh students and we have a good balance between those who have helped out for a number of years as well as new starters.

Publicity and Promotion

Judging by the numbers of people now visiting the Spinney, our publicity and promotion would appear to be working. With the installation of the new equipment, word got around about the Spinney and during the course of the summer, there was a substantial increase in visitors - on some days the car park and access road were completely full!

The BWT organized a promotional stall at the Bythams School May Fete which was very well received. We aimed to publicise ourselves to a wider community audience and combined a good display of photographs with a quiz on what types of trees and animals you can see at the Spinney. We produced a handout for our promotional events which provided a snapshot of the changes we have been making together with a map of how to find the Spinney.

We regularly publicise our working week-ends and events in the Glenside and Gavin Pye has updated our website at www.bythamspinney.co.uk. We have investigated how best we might optimize voluntary donations through <http://www.charitygiving.co.uk/bythamswoodland>. We are also on Facebook on www.facebook.com/bythamsSpinney.

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 do not want to take all the fun out of the site by making it a sterile play environment, so we are careful to manage the adventurous elements of those activities and attractions that we provide. All our play equipment conforms to recognised EU standards and we have proper risk assessments that are continually reviewed. Notwithstanding this, in terms of how we operate on site, we have reviewed our health and safety policy and revamped our procedures.

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.

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. Judith Smith continues to 'mastermind' the regular on-site works; Sam Adams has kept us in a very sound financial shape managing our growing and more complex budgets with great skill; Gavin Pye has always been ready to help out with emergency repairs and has picked up on all our web and ITC work, while Simon Garbutt has led the team in working on the sensory garden and taking photos of the site. Luke Houghton and Gillian Twine from Clipsham together with children Thomas and James have been very willing helpers for whatever is asked of them.

We give our best wishes to the Duke of Edinburgh students who have made a real difference this year - Edward Sheehan, Michael Digan and Frankie Pye.

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, who helped us get our wheelie-bins and to Trevor Harris, who services all our mechanical equipment. It was sad that the Head Teacher from the Bythams School left during the year as she had been a very positive supporter. While we hope that new links can be made, we are very fortunate that FOBS are now much more involved in what we do.

We are also very appreciative of our funders - the local Parish Councils for their continued support in kind and funds, the Castle Bytham Fair Committee for its grant, 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
09.06.13

