



THE BYTHAMS WOODLAND TRUST
(Registered Charity 1100816)

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2014/15

Introduction

I am very pleased to be able to introduce the eleventh 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 2014 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 with no major funding applications made.

We were very pleased to receive a grant from the Castle Bytham Fair Committee. Any such contribution is vital to help with the day to day running costs of the Spinney, without which, our financial position would be significantly weaker.

We started on-line text giving and this has generated a small amount of income with potential for further development.

Site Works

The main focus of our work has very much been to ensure that the overall site 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 major challenge was to rebuild the embankment under the rope tree swing near the main picnic area. Over the years this area had become quite severely eroded. We decided to terrace the slope with wooden sleepers and then, courtesy of John and Guy Turner, several loads of top soil were delivered for us to level off and let settle before seeding. With any luck the swing will be back in use for the summer holidays.

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 and wildflower species appearing, but managing the thistles remains a big challenge. However, the 'topping' and hedge cutting arrangement with John Turner has worked well.

The hedge laying we undertook during 2013 is looking pretty good, but we were not able to start on the roadside hedge as there were other priorities on the site.

Tree Dressing Day

Following the success of the first tree dressing day in 2013, we organised a second on November 28th. Once again, 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. Just under 350 people attended as the weather was not as good as in the previous year, but that did not stop everyone having a great time!

Publicity and Promotion

Judging by the numbers of people now visiting the Spinney, our publicity and promotion would appear to be working extremely well. 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, so we have had to create an overflow area on the meadow.

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 and our 'likes' have reached just under 600.

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 second ROSPA Play Area Safety Inspection Report in August and it is very pleasing to note that in all areas, there was nothing at a high risk. However, there were a few actions that were identified as needing remediation, and these have been actioned.

Future Plans

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 of the woodland 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!

We have also been in discussions as to how we might be able to assist in the management of neighbouring woodland areas, in particular the Yew Tree Avenue, Clipsham.

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 into the Spinney. All the Management Committee use their different skills and experience to ensure that the BWT is in a fit organisational state to do what it wants to do. We also have a really solid Saturday morning maintenance crew who put in the time week in, week out. So thanks to Judith, Sam, Gavin, Simon, Richard, Simon C, Luke, Gillian, James and Thomas.

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 Richard Clarke, the new Head Teacher at the Bythams School, who has 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 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 warmest 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
07.06.15

