



THE BYTHAMS WOODLAND TRUST
(Registered Charity 1100816)

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2015/16

Introduction

I am very pleased to be able to introduce the twelfth 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

The only constitutional change this year, which was approved at the last AGM and subsequently by the Charity Commission, was that allowing the Trust to work for the benefit of the inhabitants of Rutland. 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 2015 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 very successful year in respect to fund raising with our award of £8,000 from the TESCO Bags of Help scheme. Though the funding will not come through until July 2016, it is good to know we have it in place so we can plan our improvements for later in the year.

We were also fortunate to receive £300 from the Lincolnshire Community Foundation which allowed us to acquire some new bark chippings and we were successful with the Waitrose Community/Charity scheme.

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

Our on-line text Just Giving has begun to generate a healthy regular amount of income with good potential for further development.

Site Works

The main focus of our work remains to keep the site maintained in a good condition to respond to the increase in use by visitors. The BWT work schedule during the year is demanding in terms of general maintenance - mowing, strimming, leaf clearing and gleaning fallen branches, coppicing and general tidying, building new steps. The sensory garden always requires a high degree of maintenance - mainly planting and weeding by hand!

We were able to re-open the swing bank in time for the summer holidays after it had been terraced and built up with new soil, plastic matting and seeding. It was immediately in use but has stood up well to the wear and tear.

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. A new positive development has been the agreement of a Farm Business Tenancy agreement with John and Guy Turner, who will now manage the meadow on our behalf as part of a Direct Payment Scheme for organically managed habitats.

Tree Dressing Day

We organised a third event 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 and lots of cakes. FOBS also has the brilliant idea of starting the day with a fun run for children around the site. This got people in early, warmed up and ready for refreshments. More than 400 people attended even though the weather was not that great, but that did not stop everyone having a good time!

Charter for Trees, Woods and People

The BWT became one of first Charter Branches of the Woodland Trust's national campaign to promote the importance and value of trees, woodlands and forests, linked into the historical Charter of the Forest (which will have its 800th anniversary in 2017). This recognises the singular value of what we do to help improve the connections between woodlands, wildlife and people. This has also led to some excellent promotion and publicity, including an article in the Guardian On-Line in January 2015, a mammoth photography session on a very cold day in December and also some plans for filming with the school under their Community Woodlands scheme.

Break-In

The main disappointment (and frustration and annoyance) was to turn up on the first work day of 2016 to find that the container had been broken into and all our power tools, including a half ton chipper, had been stolen. This evidently was the work of a professional gang and though the Police were immediately notified, no-one has been caught. That said, we would like to thank the NFU, our insurers, for being very supportive and prompt in dealing with our claim,

We also had a great response from our Spinney supporters with many goodwill messages and also the impromptu gig at the Castle Inn on February 27th by Uninvited Guests. The Tool-Raider Tour raised nearly £300.

Publicity and Promotion

Judging by the numbers of people now visiting the Spinney, our publicity and promotion in all its forms is working extremely well. We are now getting lots of use not only from local people but also many who come in from much wider afield. On some days the main car park and access road are completely full, so the overflow area on the meadow has proven to be a welcome addition.

Following the Tree Dressing Day and linking into our Charter work, we had a brilliant full two page article in the Stamford Mercury - some great text and photos. We could not have asked for more!

The BWT organized a promotional stall at the Bythams School May Fete which was very well received . 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 well over 1200.

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 third 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. The minor actions that were identified as needing remediation have been completed, with the larger ones being factored into our TESCO funding application.

Future Plans

High quality, ongoing site maintenance and upkeep of the woodland will be critical to keep the site in good condition. Though we have some new funding for repairs, we have discussed a new substantial grant application to one of the major funders for some further works, including the possible installation of some compost loos!

The arrangement with the Turners has secured the future for the Meadow and in time will generate sufficient funds to keep this well managed as a natural wildflower habitat.

A subsidiary project for the BWT has been the establishment of the Clipsham Yew Tree Avenue Trust which plans to work in partnership with the Forestry Commission and Rutland County Council to restore and manage this important and beautiful site. To date, using the very sound track record of the BWT, funding has been raised to undertake a health check of the yew trees and also for the topiary works, but progress on the contractual arrangements between the Commission and County is taking a longer time to complete.

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 Sam, Gavin, Judith, Simon G, Richard, Simon C, Luke, Gillian, James and Thomas.

We have had continued support from 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 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 Martin Wilkinson, 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, TESCO Bags of Help, Lincolnshire Community Foundation, Waitrose and all those individuals who have made very kind donations throughout the year. Without this support, the Spinney could not function.

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
12.06.16

