

THE BYTHAMS WOODLAND TRUST
(Registered Charity 1100816)
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2009/10

Introduction

I am very pleased to be able to introduce the sixth 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 both behind the scenes and on our many working weekends during the past year.

Constitution

There have been no major constitutional issues this year and it is pleasing to note that the one we have in place is working well.

The annual returns to the Charity Commission have been completed on time. New Committee co-options were made at the AGM in 2009 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. It is nice to record that we have a number of young people on the Committee.

Funding

During the course of the year, the BWT was again hugely successful in its funding applications. We received £8,000 from the Lincolnshire Aggregates Sustainability Levy Fund (LALSF) in August to help us enter into a long term lease of the land to the north of the current site for the purpose of creating a new wildflower meadow. Right at the very end of the year we received an additional £4,000 to enable us to change the lease into outright purchase and then a further £500 to help us with legal costs that originally we did not think we would need.

We were also able to draw down the second year of the Grassroots Fund which has provided a three year funding package specifically for our day to day running costs, eg; paying insurance.

Partly as a result of BWT volunteers helping out with the Bythams Music Festival in August, we were on their shortlist of local charities and were donated £250 for the second year running.

We were very pleased to receive the first year payments from Castle Bytham, Little Bytham and Careby Parish Councils whose contributions are critical to help with the day to day running costs of the Spinney.

We have also made a major application (£49,500) to the Community Spaces programme funded through the Big Lottery. In December we were advised that we had been successful in getting through the first stage and following a meeting with the Groundwork Facilitator, Julie Fulton, in January, we have progressed the second stage for submission in June 2010. This application will be for some new items of adventure play equipment aimed at children aged over 5.

Site Works

The work schedule during the year has been particularly demanding, especially because of the need to spend up all the grant funds we generated. The Spinney is a big site to look after in terms of everyday maintenance - mowing, strimming, clearing fallen branches, chipping and tidying. The new chipper, christened 'the treeminator' is superb machine for the coppicing and recycling of wood chips.

During the autumn we began a phased coppicing of the site, removing dead and straggly trees and bushes to open up the ground for more sunlight. This is the first stage of a longer term woodland management plan.

The main area of work focused on the sensory garden. This required a lot of digging and loosening up the soil prior to some intensive planting days - which always seemed to fall on cold, wet and windy days. Nevertheless, the garden site which looked bare for a long time has suddenly come alive and in time will be a riot of colour and fragrant smells. One trick we learnt to help keep away the deer from eating new plants was to hang up human hair in worn out tights!

The heritage orchard is developing well and there have been many favourable comments from visitors.

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.

Links with School and Community Groups

The BWT maintains its close links with the Bythams Primary School and organizations like the Guides, Brownies and Rainbows. The school is making greater 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 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.

The BWT organized promotional stalls at both the Little Bytham Fete and Castle Bytham Fair and these were 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.

Publicity and Promotion

We regularly publicise our working week-ends and events in the Glenside and Angus Smith has updated our website at <http://community.lincolnshire.gov.uk/thespinner>.

Future Plans

It is really pleasing to see that The Spinney is beginning to mature with play equipment being well used and plants really starting to grow. There is also an amazing array of wildlife living in and on the site - deer, badgers, foxes, rabbits, and many species of birds and insects.

What is particularly nice to know is that the work that we are doing to encourage children to play outdoors and learn about nature, together with our Heritage Orchard fits in totally with campaigns promoted nationally by Natural England.

There are some major improvements and developments in the pipeline as we have alluded to in the section on funding. We now have the funding to acquire the land for the hay meadow and the legal arrangements are being progressed.

Assuming we are successful in our Community Spaces application we would hope to have all these works completed during 2010/11.

We are delighted to retain the hard core of willing volunteers who give up a couple of hours every other week-end, and it was great that on certain key dates a lot of extra helpers joined up to plant up the sensory garden. 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 had!

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. She is "the boss" and is always well supported by her family; 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 Simon Garbutt has led the team in designing and working on the sensory garden.

And then there have been the regulars who, come rain or shine, turn up to get things done - your help and support is gratefully received.

The Bythams School and FOBS have again been very supportive throughout the year. James Shawley, the Head Teacher, is a great believer in the value and importance of the Spinney as part of the school's environmental curriculum.

There are many other people who have helped out and if I have not mentioned you by name, please do not be offended, but do note that the BWT really does appreciate your efforts.

Behind the scenes, there are friends who sit on the Management Committee to make sure our governance is good. Thanks to the Willoughby for allowing us to use their premises for our meetings, to the Police, who keep an eye out for us, and to The Glenside News, for regularly publishing our news and stories, and to those contractors who have helped with some of the bigger aspects of work. In particular, Tim Russell has provided superb support, advice and guidance on the establishment of the sensory garden for which we are really grateful.

We are also very appreciative of our funders - the local Parish Councils, Lincolnshire County Council, South Kesteven District Council, the Grassroots Fund, Community Lincs, Welland SSP, EMDA for the Welland Pot, the Bythams Music Festival.

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

28.05.10