



THE BYTHAMS WOODLAND TRUST
(Registered Charity 1100816)

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2011/12

Introduction

I am very pleased to be able to introduce the eighth 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 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 2011 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

The main success during this year was winning £49,750 from the Community Spaces programme funded through the Big Lottery and managed by Groundwork UK. Once secured, we needed to comply with the funding criteria which required us to submit our proposals to external tender. With the assistance of Julie Fulton from Groundwork, six companies were asked to tender and two submitted by the due date. Following our evaluation procedures, the contract was awarded to Adventure Playgrounds Limited (APL), a company who had done previous work on site.

In addition to the main fund, the BWT was eligible to apply for up to £3,500 as part of the Sustainability Grant - which we duly have done and it has been approved. This needs to be spent up by April 2013.

We were very pleased to receive the third year payments from Castle Bytham, Little Bytham and Careby Parish Councils. These contributions are 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 and there was a surprise donation of £500 from the Jack Patson Charitable Trust.

Site Works

The main focus of work was the installation of the new play equipment - a space net, a spider's web climbing net, a bespoke hillside walkway and lookout post and a 10 meter curved slide. APL started work in early October and made excellent progress through to the end of November. However, during the Xmas period, APL was forced into administration which meant that the final item - the slide - could not be installed within the initial timeline. That said, Adventure Playgrounds was re-born as Action Play and Leisure, who agreed to complete the works on the same basis as APL. The final works were completed at the end of April.

Other than the main contractor installations, 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. We also prepared a pathway from the main site to the new Meadow, which will be opened once the grasses are fully grown. The heritage orchard has now been completed and there have been many favourable comments from visitors.

The work on the Meadow was very weather dependent. Having prepared the site, during July, we secured some green hay bales harvested from local species-rich grassland sites with the help of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and then having rolled these out across the Meadow, we spread the grasses by hand. However, during a very dry summer and autumn, it was difficult to know whether the seeds had germinated. The Meadow was also covered with some large stones, which required a good deal of stone picking and clearing.

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.

Links with School and Community Groups

The BWT has made links with the new Head Teacher at the Bythams Primary School (Claire Duncan) and also FOBS (new 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 BWT missed a trick in not attending the School May Fair but subsequently, having spoken to the school, it is apparent that there are some excellent opportunities for us to work together more closely in the future.

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.

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 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>.

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. She is "the boss" and is always well supported by her family Charles, Eric and Angus; 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, and 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 wish well the Duke of Edinburgh students who have made a real difference this year - Edward Sheehan and Frankie Pye.

Thanks to the Willoughby Arms for allowing us to use their premises for our meetings, to the Police who keep an eye out for us, The Glenside News, for regularly publishing our news and stories and Chris Wright on the community information e-network. In particular, Tim Rasell continues to provide superb support, advice and guidance on the development of the sensory garden for which we are really grateful.

Julie Fulton and the Groundwork Project Officers have been really supportive in guiding us through the Community Spaces funding programme. Mark Adams has provided excellent expert advice and guidance as our Lead Professional in the management of our major project works.

Andy Menaul, Dean Barker and all the staff at Adventure Playgrounds/Action Play and Leisure have worked really hard during the autumn, winter and spring to install the new equipment, and they have been very responsive to our changing requirements.

We are also very appreciative of our funders - the local Parish Councils for their third year of local support, the Castle Bytham Fair Committee for its grant, the Jack Patson Charitable Trust 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.

In Memoriam

I would like to pay our respects to Aubrey Edinburgh who was a regular visitor at the Spinney and liked to attend our AGMs. He will be missed.

Dr Patrick Candler, Chairman of BWT
05.06.12

