

PROJECT CLOSING REPORT - REGENERATION OF ASHWOOD PARK

1. OVERVIEW

Ashwood Park was at one time a beautiful space but it had become very neglected - sad, dark and not really used as a park, just a corridor between Morrisons and the Wye Bridge. Volunteers from Buxton Town Team, students from Buxton and Leek College and High Peak Borough Council (HPBC) made a start in restoring the park to some of its former glory. This work has included a general tidy, planting, cleaning, painting river cleans and cutting back of shrubs to bring light and colour back to the area.

2. DETAIL OF WHAT TOOK PLACE

Work that we have completed so far:

- Cut back much of the vegetation that obscured the River Wye and Hogshaw Brook.
- Weeding and cutting back of the vegetation near the steps by the Wye Bridge.
- Planting of 4,000 tete a tete daffodils on A6 entrance to the park (over two years).
- Awarded a grant of £1000 (Bingham Trust) to clear and plant the two large beds at the end of the large lawn. The Devils Walking Stick shrubs in the beds blocked the view down the park and were also starting to lift tarmac on the paths, in fact they had become so invasive that some of the grant had to be spent hiring plant to remove all the soil from the beds. HPBC provided the top soil and the rest of the grant money was spent on herbaceous perennials.
- Cleared and planted many flower beds with donated plants throughout the park.
- Had the concrete slabs removed by HPBC from the children's play area (disused) at the Morrisons end of the park to enable the creation of wildflower beds. Seeds were from GrowWild which I applied for on behalf of the group.
- With HPBC commissioned a Derbyshire Wildlife Survey of the park (DWT are very busy with the local plan at present so it has delayed our survey report). This will be a very useful document when it comes to planning. It identified the presence of the White Letter Hairstreak Butterfly feeding off the wych elms in the park.
- Cut back the edges of the lawns to reveal the paths. Much of this work was carried out by students.
- Dug and planted the two flower beds next to the Wye Bridge that had been used as a 'car park'. Plants provided by HPBC and we have since inter-planted with more donated plants.
- Signed up to be part of Waterside Care who helped us manage three river cleans to remove rubbish from the river. The collaboration with Waterside Care and their help with a risk assessment persuaded HPBC to allow volunteers to enter the river (HPBC had first refused permission).
- Cleaned and repainted benches and bridges.
- Cut back the snow berries at the Morrisons end of the park to reveal a view of the river and weir.
- Run two days of Action with Nestle and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust with local school children to plant bluebells and create wildlife habitats.
- After training from WatersideCare carried out monthly water pollution tests on both the River Wye and Hogshaw Brook on behalf of the Environment Agency.
- Discussed the closed bridge with HPBC who have agreed to survey the bridge and have agreed to put £5000 towards the restoration or demolition.
- Successfully applied for 30 saplings from the Woodland Trust and these will be planted in conjunction with the HPBC Tree Officer in March 2017.

In 2016 we entered Ashwood Park in the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood and we were awarded a Level 3 (Advancing) which is a great achievement for a first time entry to the competition.

3. ASSESSMENT AGAINST AIMS AND SUCCESS CRITERIA

The aims were to:

- Make the park a more beautiful, usable and friendlier space that can be used by the whole community.
- Develop a pride and ownership of the park by involving as many members of the community as possible in the project including residents and students.
- Horticultural skills transfer by working in partnership with the park keeper (HPBC).
- Apply for Green Flag status.

All the above aims have been achieved and more, except for Green Flag status. HPBC were approached to apply for Green Flag status, but the costs are prohibitive. It should be noted that not even the Pavilion Gardens is in the Green Flag scheme.

There is no doubt that the park is a more open, colourful and better place to be than 2 years ago. The footfall through the park has increased, there is less litter and certainly a reduction in dog fouling, as the park looks better cared for. We had help from the students from Buxton and Leek College and HPBC parks department and together we cleared paths, dug neglected flower beds, planted perennials and bulbs and litter picked. The Town Team, with the support of Waterside Care, together with the Buxton Lions carried out three river clearing sessions which were very well attended.

4. ANY FURTHER BENEFITS

Claire gave two presentations about the work in the park to Burbage Garden Society and Fairfield Scouts. By raising the profile of the work in the park Burbage Gardening Society planted a row of daffodils along the opposite side of the A6 to the park and many of their members donated herbaceous perennials for planting in the park. As a result of the presentation to the Scouts they are now in discussion with HPBC about adopting the small 'park' half way down Fairfield Road.

The river cleans and clean-up days attracted as many as 20 volunteers from the Town Team and the Buxton Lions, who were all very enthusiastic about the project.

5. COSTS

Project expenditure against anticipated cost was as follows:

EXPENDITURE	£	INCOME	£
Cleared, top soiled and replanted two large flower beds.	1000	Bingham Trust Grant to clear and replant large flower beds half way down the park	1000
Paint for benches and bridges	386		
Total	£ 1386	Total	£ 1000
Net Expenditure	£ 386		

6. LEARNING POINTS

With hindsight it was unrealistic to authorize a project of this scale with a zero budget. Even where we believe external funding or project income will cover all the costs, projects should always be allocated a budget for unanticipated items.

Where projects are of a very practical nature, with frequent repeat activities over an extended period, review meetings should be held reasonably regularly to ensure good communications between project team members and maintain a focus on agreed priorities.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

My overall vision for the park is that it should be 'divided' into three areas - formal (Wye Bridge end), activity (bowling green and tennis courts and wildlife area (Morrisons end).

I strongly believe that we now need some larger grant money for the following (a starting point and not exhaustive):

- Restoration/replacement of the closed bridge, once the survey report is completed. As stated above HPBC have agreed to put £5000 towards costs.
- Restoration of many of the other beds, containing shrubs that need removal and replanting, as many of the shrubs have been neglected over the years and need to be replaced.
- All the walls around the flower beds need replacing/restoring as many of the stones have become loose. This means that when it rains all the soil runs over the paths - we have spent a lot of time removing mud from under seats and from paths that reappears after rain.
- Development of a wildflower area at the Morrisons end of the park (where the wildflower beds are) so that the grass can be allowed to grow into a meadow with cut paths - but as you know this needs careful management.
- I have also had the idea that we could develop a bog garden near the tennis courts in an attempt to manage the water logging issue.
- The stone walls of the river are also starting to decay and holes are starting to appear.
- Removal of some of trees eg yews around the tennis courts, on the railway embankment and along the river (many are saplings that have just been allowed to grow)
- Restoration of the tennis courts etc

Claire Millard

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