

## **Reports to Environment Committee 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023**

### **Allotments Association**

Since we reported to the Parish Council in March we have completed the development of a bog or rainwater garden at the bottom of the allotments. Apart from being a further amenity it will also help in preventing the flooding of the road at the bottom as we have installed a drain to the garden. We did this with the kind loan of a mini-digger from Lovell Homes and completed the work over a Bank Holiday weekend. We have since had it proved during the thunderstorms we had recently that it works perfectly.

As part of our continuing improvements of the site and mentioned at the March meeting, we are extending the social area around the shed into the small orchard that was previously part of plot 47 and make this a pleasant area in which to relax and take a break. Work has started on this project which will include removing spreading blackthorn, installing a dead hedge against the properties along Coley lane to provide privacy and to encourage wildlife, particularly birds. We will make a picnic area and surround it with perennials and wildflowers. It is worth mentioning that we received some of these plants from the bloomers that were grown on site (from the community plot) in a partnership that is proving to be very worthwhile to both parties. As the area was formerly an orchard there will be plenty of fruit for members to pick in the Autumn.

As was mentioned at March's meeting we will continue to fund projects such as this from our fund-raising efforts and if needed the development part of the Contingency fund.

Another project that we are putting money and effort into is the upgrade of our website for something more user friendly and reactive.

We have now gone through the tenancy renewal process and the exact numbers are 48 full plots, 6 three-quarter plots, and 19 half plots for a total of 73 plots. There are a further 60 members who are joint tenants ie wives, husbands, sons and daughters who pay personal liability insurance giving a total of 133 members. The waiting list has been reduced to 20, due to member's retirements, splitting of plots and two people on the waiting list not taking up the chance of an allotment due to a change in circumstance.

We had a stall at the Jubilee for the Kings Coronation and by taking donations for vegetable plants and having a raffle we collected £77.52 which we have given to the Little Laura charity again.

Our own allotments open day this year will be held on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July with proceeds again being shared with Katherine House Hospice. Three weeks prior we will again be taking part in open gardens.

At the meeting in March I outlined our committee's thoughts on the need for a defibrillator on site at the allotments and asked the council to look kindly on a request for one.

We understand that the council thought this was a good idea and gave the go-ahead with AEDDonate to provide one for us. Unfortunately it was not quite that simple as there is no power at the allotments and despite the fact that we thought we could provide power ourselves by virtue of a solar panel, it was thought this might affect the warranty. AEDDonate can provide a defib with its own solar power but the cost is twice the price of a normal unit.

To help the situation we agreed that we should suggest that the £800 that the council has earmarked for as contingency for the allotments be used towards the additional cost if this would help.

Our end of year accounts shows that we have £4217.05 in our contingency fund, (£3100 contingency + £1117.05 development as described in new agreement with PC). We have also added an additional £200 over and above the normal contribution of £350 to the fund this year to protect it against the higher inflation rate as we feel this would be prudent.

There was a discussion at the last meeting about the provision of a sign at the entrance for emergency services to quickly identify the site, however due to cost of application alone which was more than the cost of the sign it was decided that the entrance should be located using 'what3words'. This is  
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## **Colwich Parish in Bloom**

This is a busy time of year for the Bloomers as not only is it the start of general planting in the villages but in Great Haywood we are preparing for our entry in the RHS Britain in Bloom assessment. The judges are visiting us on 5 July. The Bloomers have a high standard to maintain as we have consistently achieved the Gold Award accreditation in previous years. We strongly support the It's Your Neighbourhood scheme with 4 groups entering this year and the judges will be visiting us on 26 June. The groups are Friends of Mill Lane, Queen's Sapphire Jubilee Community Orchard, Friends of Shugborough Terrace and Friends of Crossheads. All have previously received a rating of Level 5, Outstanding.

Our work clearing and planting the grassed area fronting Great Haywood Abbey is virtually complete and we now have 2 pollinator friendly flower beds situated either side of the Abbey entrance. The original circular beds have been removed and the area grass seeded. We've provided Information Boards which describe how important these beds are for butterflies, bees and other insects. We hope to provide more pollinator friendly flower beds in the village in the future which is part of our support for SinCH and the Green Infrastructure Plan. The overgrown grassed area which was part of a wildflower trial has also been removed, the ivy which was growing out of control on the Abbey wall has been trimmed back and a new flower bed near the hexagonal planter established.

The Bloomers new venture on the allotments has proved to be a major success with a large number of bedding plants and perennials grown in the polytunnel. These have made a significant cost saving contribution to our new planting schemes which would otherwise have been affected by much higher prices this year from Roseacre and Canalside. We have received a grant from EH Smith Builders Merchants charity funding scheme which will allow us to replace the poor fencing we have inherited on our plot. We are considering installing a programmed watering system for the next growing season.

Some of the grant from EH Smith will allow us to improve the surface of the Oldfields Lane bridleway by laying limestone chippings in the areas prone to be muddy in inclement weather. Daffodils and Bluebells have been planted and a couple of dry hedges have been constructed from branches of trees which have been trimmed during our work to open up the bridleway for the benefit of walkers and dog walkers. An Information Board has also been installed here.

The sponsorship from the Colwich and Haywoods Community Association has enabled us to provide new trophies for our community floral awards and for our private garden competition. New protective clothing and gardening tools are also planned.

## **Flower and Vegetable Show**

As usual at this point in the Show preparation timetable, there has been very little activity on the part of the Committee. However, some of what has been achieved is absolutely critical to the successful running of the event.

- No less than 5 new judges have been appointed, some of whom have operated at a very senior level in their field.
- With photocopying assistance from the Parish Clerk, 250 schedules have been prepared and distribution has commenced. This is the earliest that this has been done.
- Mark Connell, Chairman of the Colwich and Haywoods Community Association has kindly agreed to present the Trophies at the end of the afternoon.

- Refreshments at the Show will be served in the Hall by the WI from the kitchen hatch with the option for visitors to take their drinks etc. to a covered area with tables and chairs on the grass outside. This year the WI has also been persuaded to include homemade cakes on the menu.

All other planning activities are in hand, and we are looking forward to a well-supported and very successful Show on 10<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Green Infrastructure Delivery Group (GIDG)**

### **1. Purpose**

This report updates on the approach being taken, progress to date, the evolving action plan (Appendix 1) and flags any difficulties/challenges and makes recommendations for these to be addressed.

### **2. Background**

On 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 the Parish Council agreed SinCH's proposals to assist in the delivery of the Green Infrastructure Plan. The key focus being the "Urban Zone" and connectivity with other zones. A Green Infrastructure Delivery Group was formed in January which comprises of representatives from SinCH, the Colwich In Bloom Group and two Parish Councillors.

### **3. Approach to moving forward**

Due to the emphasis in the Green Infrastructure Plan on biodiversity, sustainable management of open spaces and creation of corridors and stepping stones the group has been focussed on the following:

- Surveying and assessing biodiversity within habitats, not just individual species in isolation.
- Recognising that it is not always appropriate to plant flowers as we need to recognise the wider wildlife benefit of the "green habitat".
- Understanding the lifecycle of plants and identifying management plans (including optimal time for strimming and control of invasive species).
- Defining the right time and method to undertake work.
- Involving land owners and residents.

This approach means that visible differences on site are unlikely to be seen before spring 2024.

### **4. Progress since March**

#### **4.1 Mapping the landscape and land ownership.**

- QGIS software being updated with new information.
- Initial discussions have started with some landowners:
  - SBC Streetscene have met with us and have promised to provide a definitive list of land owned by the Borough and other sites they maintain on behalf of others.
  - Contact has been made with the BT and they are open in principle to community activity on the St Mary's site.

#### **4.2 Creating and updating a baseline of habitats, species and wildlife concentrations.**

- Usage of the I-Naturalist mobile phone app has been promoted and between January and 10<sup>th</sup> June software 899 new sightings (220 species) have been made in the villages.
- From this data key species for protection / expansion are being defined.

#### **4.3 Projects**

- A number of priority sites have been identified for work to start in 2023.
  - Coley Lane nature corridor (5 linked sites)
  - Back Lane and Coley Grove Nature Corridor
  - Bulb planting on land at the bottom of Manor Farm Drive
  - Support for St Michael's church wildflower meadow
- In addition the following ideas are being explored:
  - Wildlife friendly bed at St Marys's drive.
  - A community-led scheme on Millers Croft.

- A redesign of StreetScene mowing regimes.
- Contact has been made with BT over their land on St Mary's Drive.
- In terms of partners mainstream work which also supports the campaign:
  - In Bloom work on pollinator beds in Great Haywood has begun.
  - In Bloom work at Oldfields bridlepath.
  - A *Support the Hedgehogs* campaign was launched at the Space for nature stall at the Coronation fete.
  - SinCH has arranged a Bee safari on 20<sup>th</sup> August.

#### 4.4 Site Survey/Assessment and Design

- Before starting work on sites it is important to properly understand what is there, how it fits into the environment and the value to wildlife.
- A Survey and Assessment sheet has been prototyped at 6 sites to create baselines and to help identify next steps.
- Research is underway to find the relevant advice and tools to design and deliver projects.
- Engagement has started with some landowners.
- Streetscene is open to changing their work methods to support the plan and would consider altering their mowing regimes and will entertain applications to plant trees in appropriate places.
- NB Consultation with neighbours is needed to obtain input and buy-in.

#### 4.5 Publicising the initiative

- The *Space for Nature* campaign was launched by the Parish Council in its spring newsletter and a parish council email address for the public to contact the campaign has been created.
- The Parish Council has subsequently decided that this name is inappropriate.
- An article has been written for the next Parish Newsletter.
- Options for signage for at site project areas are being explored in order to inform the public about what's going on.

#### 4.6 Involving the community in taking action

- A key aspect of the work is to engage local residents in helping to identify sites and activities, but also to engage in delivery work and maintenance.
- So far 10 people have come forward to support the current project sites.

#### 4.7 Funding requirements

- More work is needed to understand the financial and logistical implications.

### 5.0 Difficulties and challenges

#### 5.1 Volunteer time

Progress will be dictated by volunteers' available time and sense of motivation to "go the extra mile".

#### 5.2 Strimming regimes

- This year it has not been possible to engage with sufficient landowners to stop early strimming of verges. Mowing and strimming is happening before wildflower seeds have set or bulbs have built up their reserves.
- A wild patch will also benefit many creatures and shouldn't just be "tidied up" unless it is blocking access or visibility.
- Work needs to be done with landowners to negotiate agreements to reschedule work patterns and to communicate these to any contractors involved.
- It will take time to change attitudes and embed new ways of thinking and working so some signage may be needed to remind people what not to trim (and when), and to explain to the public what is going on.

#### 5.3 Getting the balance right between accessibility, safety and letting nature take priority.

- Public understanding about the need to support nature has taken massive steps forwards and the majority are now attuned to the idea of giving nature more help.
- The Delivery Group will be developing an approach to signage to explain to residents what is being done and why.
- Some areas must be intensively managed but other areas are best managed in a more nature-friendly way, which will involve some “scruffiness” at times, which will be tidied up at the right time.
- The Parish Council's work on the Butts is a very good example of getting the balance right – the site is clearly maintained but to the middle and rear nature is left alone through May and June to promote biodiversity.
- It is therefore vital for landowners and the Green Infrastructure Delivery Group to have specific management plans in place for each site in order that the right thing happens at the right time and in the right way. This can ensure that access and amenity value is maintained without an indiscriminate strimming or felling of trees which have wildlife value.
- In order that the right thing happens at the right time protocols need to be in place to underpin this.

#### 5.4 Further Parish Council activity in support of the Green Infrastructure Plan

- The Parish Council has a leadership role in delivering the Green Infrastructure Plan and in influencing the community.

This means leading from the front in three ways:

- Having the right management plans and protocols in place for the land it owns.
- Being an opinion-former and leader by supporting the work being done to improve biodiversity and not being unduly swayed by a voluble minority who complain about what they perceive to be “untidiness”.
- Not undertaking work on other’s land without full consultation with the landowner and any community group maintaining features on that site.

#### 6.0 Recommendations:

- 6.1 This Committee supports the approach being taken.
- 6.2 Recommends that the Parish Council develops and adopts environmental management plans and protocols governing the maintenance of each Parish-owned site.
- 6.3 Recommends that the Parish Council does not undertake clearing work on other’s land without full consultation with the landowner and any community group maintaining features on that site.