



Welcome to the Friends of Wickford Memorial Park Newsletter Summer 2021

We are a constituted group of volunteers working with Basildon Council Parks and Countryside Manager and the Park Manager to safeguard and improve the park.

Message from our Chair, Kim Oakes

Welcome to our Summer Newsletter.

As you will see there is plenty going on we are always looking for new projects to improve the park. We have worked very hard over the last year and have a friendly volunteer group. Everyone is welcome to volunteer there is no obligation to come regularly. If you can only make a session once a month or so that would be a great help. Or join us on a project, for example, planting trees or bulbs in the Autumn it would be a great help.

Looking forward to developing the Beauchamps Field, please keep your eye out for future projects.

Many thanks to the volunteers who have worked to make the park glorious.

Group News

- ❖ Depending on the weather and the jobs in hand we usually meet on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 09.30 and everyone is welcome to come along. You don't need to be a gardener or have a knowledge of plants to join in so please look at the Events tab on our Facebook page for work party dates.
- ❖ We have tools and hives for volunteers to use but we would ask that everyone wears enclosed footwear, robust gardening gloves and be aware of hand hygiene. We have a sharps container in the lockup should anyone find needles and we also have hand sanitiser available
- ❖ Basildon Council have made changes to the staffing structure for parks and open spaces a position of Bio Diversity Officer has been created and this person should be in place by September. The group is really looking forward to working with this person to improve the park for wildlife and to make a proper record of the trees, birds, insects and animals that call it home.



❖ The Shadow Wickford Town Council organised a **High street clean up** on the 13th June and 11 of our volunteers joined in the efforts to make the High Street a cleaner and tidier place.

- ❖ The group held its first **Annual General Meeting** by zoom earlier in the year. The reports are available under the Files tab on our facebook page.
- ❖ Stephen Oakes keeps a tally of the **volunteer hours** worked in the park and so far our volunteers have clocked up in excess of 1382 plus the time the committee spend in meetings and admin etc.



❖ A **Wickford in Bloom** group has recently been formed and the Park group donated 6 trays of surplus geranium and helped plant them to the planters already in the High Street. When they flower they will add colour to the greenery.



Park News



Darren Tansley, the **Essex Wildlife** River Catchment Co-ordinator and Natalie Singleton, Essex Wildlife River Catchment Officer visited the park in May to give advice about the ways in which the river and its banks could be best cared for. Darren and Natalie will be working with the Council's Bio Diversity Officer next year and also gave us advice about removing an invasive non native weed called Himalyan Balsam from the river banks in the park. They also suggested cutting back some of the brambles to let light into the river banks to encourage the growth of native plants.



Natalie would be very interested to hear from anyone interested in being a **river warden** as currently we don't have any in our area. To be put on the list for induction and training which will probably take place in September please email volunteering@essex.org.uk also copying your message to riverw@essexswt.org.uk

Wickford Wildlife Society came to the park and met with the group and park staff in early June to discuss the plans for Beauchamps field. Barbara Chapman wrote the following piece following that meeting.

Members of the Friends of the Wickford Memorial Park and of Wickford Wildlife Society met on site recently at the new Beauchamps Field Nature Reserve extension, to discuss plans for the future with Basildon Council. As well as the already planted new Woodland, there are plans for a Community Orchard and a Wild Flower Meadow, and it's the Wild Flower Meadow that I want to write about here.

In the Memorial Park there is an area, sown with colourful flowers for pollinating insects. Many of these flowers, although very good for insects, are not native, so wouldn't fit into the British Wild Flower Meadow description. The best plants for the new Meadow are ones that grow locally, so are adapted to grow and thrive in our Essex soil. Some of them, for example Bristly Oxtongue with bright yellow flowers, you would probably call a weed if you found it growing in your garden! After all, a weed is only a plant which is growing where it isn't wanted. Beautiful native plants like Scarlet Pimpernel you might also call a weed if you didn't want it in your garden.

We will be discussing which plant species will be the best for the Meadow area, not only for insects but also for birds, who may feed on the insects or on the seeds of the plants. It is quite likely that ant colonies will form, which will be food for the lovely Green Woodpecker, and maybe voles and other small rodents will come in, which will attract some birds, like Owls and Kestrels. In time, it's also possible that lovely Orchids, like Bee and Pyramidal Orchids, may appear, as they have alongside many Essex roadsides.

So the future of Beauchamps Field Nature Reserve is looking very bright indeed!

By **Barbara Chapman** (expert on Wildflowers)



Steve Prewer of Wickford Wildlife has also provided suggestions for management of the various different areas of Beauchamps Field in order to aid the recovery of the existing species and habitat and the establishment of new species of plants, birds, mammals and insects..



The wildflowers are beginning to flower over in the **wildflower garden** and we have a second bug hotel which was kindly made and donated by Alex Milne. The Rainbows had fun on Saturday morning filling it with bug friendly materials and giving it a coat of paint so we should have lots of happy bugs



We have been promised a grant of £200 to spend in the park by the **Co-operative Group** as they are keen to support local volunteers. In May we had a visit from our Wickford Store's manager Mark and Alison and they very kindly bought along biscuits and cakes for the volunteers..



The Council have built a new **car park** at the Runwell Road/Memorial entrance to the park and tidied up the existing parking area which now has allocated disabled spaces close to the gates. It is now much easier to park without damaging the grass and is clearly popular with visitors who drive to the park. The group have added donated plants to the area, including forsythia, lilac and grape hyacinths so it should look lovely in the Spring

Projects in the Park

The **Home Front Garden** is looking very beautiful. The Friends group have planted it with a wonderfully diverse selection of plants and shrubs. Bark mulch has been added to help retain moisture and suppress the weeds and thanks goes to Derek Dunn for refurbishing the benches. We are continuing to care for the plants whilst they settle in and are confident that once established and with continuing care the garden will look lovely and give both insects and people great pleasure for many years to come.



The graffiti on the container in the Council Compound has been painted out and a new

mesh fence erected. The back border in the Home Front garden has now been planted with a selection of climbers which when they grow up will help to hide the compound from view



Repainting the **crazy golf course** was finished some time ago. We refurbished 2 recycled benches and added some tyre planters with donated plants and the whole area is looking much brighter. Our volunteers will continue to look after it, watering the plants and keeping the edges of the grass tidy.

Following the planting of the 3,500 saplings and whips provided by the Woodland Trust in Beauchamps Field the group were asked to put **bark mulch** around all the trees to suppress weeds and retain moisture at the roots. This was a huge task for the volunteers and it took us quite a few work parties but we did it in the end.



Inevitably a few of the smaller whips will die but hopefully our mulching efforts will make a difference and help more survive. The rain we have had recently will certainly help as well. We have asked E Forests to donate replacement whips which we would hope to plant in the autumn to replace any casualties.

New Projects

Please check on our Facebook and web page pages for further information about future events

A big project this year is planting up and maintaining a **Spring flowering walk** behind the bungalows in Whist Avenue and Beauchamps Drive. Two of our group have been asked to suggest suitable plants for the area for planting in the Autumn and we are hoping the Council's new Biodiversity Officer will be able to advise on bird and insect friendly plants.



The Heroes Arboretum is the small area of trees to the right as you enter the park through the big gates by the Memorial on Runwell Road. The area has already been tidied up by the Council Contractors and the dead trees will be replaced. The Beacon which was removed from the front of the Memorial to make way for the car park will be re-erected in the arboretum. The Runwell Road gates are in dire need of attention and the Council have said they will attend to this. The group have applied to the Cooperative Society for a grant to add a screening fence along the boundary with Carters and to plant

spring bulbs in the grass. We are aware that at the moment there isn't anywhere for the less mobile to sit on entering the park at this gate so we would like to put benches there as well.

So far our plans for 2021 include :

- ♣ Plant up and maintain the new Spring Walk
- ♣ Maintain the Home Front Garden
- ♣ Remove Himalayan Balsam from the River Crouch
- ♣ Planting more whips (rooted cuttings) in the Beauchamps Field
- ♣ Work with the Bio Diversity Officer to catalogue the wildlife and species of trees in the park.
- ♣ Plant more Spring bulbs in various areas of the park
- ♣ Maintain the entrances to the park to keep them tidy and weed free.
- ♣ Look at ways we can improve the environment in the park for the birds, bats, insects and wildlife generally
- ♣ Work with the Council staff and Wickford Wildlife to develop and improve the habitat in Beauchamps field
- ♣ Community Orchard and New Wildflower area in the Beauchamps Field

Thanks go to

Basildon Borough Council Park staff for their enthusiastic support, all the volunteers who have given their time and worked so hard on our various projects and anyone who has donate time, money and equipment. Thanks also go to those who have posted photos of the park, some of which may have been used in this newsletter.

The mission of the Friends of Wickford Memorial Park is to:

- enhance and protect the Memorial Park
- ensure that all visitors have a pleasant experience
- promote community spirit in Wickford
- encourage good health and wellbeing for the volunteers.
- ensure the park is open and accessible to all.

We have a small committee and we have lots of ideas for projects and we hope eventually to hold events for the public in the park. The committee are looking at ways to finance future ideas and we will be looking at applying for grants and support from local organisations. Please let us know if you can point us in the direction of grants and funding.

Email: friendsofwickfordmemorialpark@hotmail.com.



Friends of the Wickford Memorial Park

Website: www.friendsofwickfordmemorialpark.co.uk

If you have any comments on the contents of this newsletter please email us or post on our Facebook page

Newsletter compiled by Marian Scott.