



Welcome to the Friends of Wickford Memorial Park Newsletter Autumn 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

Hello, All

Welcome to our Autumn 2021 newsletter

We had a great year in the park and achieved so much, we are extremely pleased with the results. There are lots of projects planned this Autumn mainly bulb planting and in the new Beauchamps Site. The park is such a valuable asset and we are pleased to be able to be involved with its development and progress.

We have over 10,000 Spring bulbs on order which we hope to plant throughout November. We will take a break over the Christmas and New Year period and look forward to welcoming new volunteers in the Spring.

All volunteers are welcome, please look out for our events on Facebook.

Group Information

- ❖ Please check our Facebook page regarding work parties. As winter approaches and the weather gets colder we will meet less frequently and only if necessary during December 2021 and January 2022
- ❖ We have tools and hi vis for volunteers to use but we would ask that everyone wears suitable clothing, enclosed footwear, robust gardening gloves and be aware of hand hygiene We have a sharps container in the lockup should anyone find needles plus hand sanitiser

Park News

Beauchamps Field

Beauchamps Field will be developed to encourage the existing species and habitat and encourage new species of plants, birds, mammals and insects. To improve the diversity of both plants and animals we are hoping to establish an insect friendly area of low lying scrub and a native wild flower meadow for pollinators as well as a community orchard and a parkland of mature trees.



The wildflower garden

The garden has been full of colour this year but the flowers have finished and died down now. Thanks to Graeme Ellis, our local Essex Beekeeper, a small water source has been added for bees and other flying insects. Volunteers have had to battle a huge crop of weeds but hopefully we managed to stop many of them setting seed so we are hoping for less weeds next year. The flowers have now been cut down and raked up and the garden will remain empty until it is prepared for sowing next year.



Projects in the Park

Himalayan Balsam

Some months ago Essex Wildlife advised us that it would be good for the River Crouch and the wildlife in the park if we could pull up as much of Himalayan Balsam growing on the river banks as possible before it could set seed. Himalayan Balsam is a fast growing, invasive weed that infests most British waterways. It prevents native plants from growing and completely dies down in the winter leaving the banks bare and muddy. We had 4 work parties together with volunteers from the River Crouch Conservation Trust. A team of volunteers from Virgin

Media also came along to the first work party helping to pull up the weeds and collect them up for disposal. We managed to pull up most of the weeds along the stretch of river that runs through the park itself. We cleared a bit through Beauchamps Field but the bushes, trees and brambles growing along the bank are so dense it made it almost impossible to reach the Balsam. As we were getting late in the season we stopped for this year but we will carry on next year. Many thanks Virgin Media volunteers and to the River Crouch Conservation volunteers who did the tricky bit of going in river.



Painting the Park Gates

The park gates at the Runwell Road entrance were installed in 1951 and had not been painted for many years. It was agreed that Basildon Council would take the gates down, have them sand blasted, undercoated and put back up ready to be repainted by a team from Virgin Media and Kelly Communications using a scissor lift provided by Kelly Communications. Virgin Media also provided paint and brushes free of charge. They also investigated whether it would be possible to reinstate the lights that had at one time

been on top of the gate posts but sadly the wiring has been removed. I am sure everyone will agree that the gates look fantastic and the whole area is much more inviting, organised and tidy. The volunteers will be planting shrubs and bulbs around the Memorial in the coming weeks

The group's volunteers joined in by helping to paint the bridge railings with Joyce and Carla providing refreshments for everyone. We are very grateful for the help given by Virgin Media as this was a big job and not one the volunteers could have tackled without help. Virgin Media have offered to give the gates another coat of paint and also to help us with the bulb planting



Park Tours.

In September the Friends Group offered tours of the park to talk about the history and development of the park and the projects that are planned for the future. The tours proved very popular and there will be more probably next Spring

Basildon Council Sports and Physical Activity Development Grant.

The group were very pleased to be awarded £992.47 in August 2021. This money is to be spent on more hi vis jackets and equipment for the group members to use whilst working in the park.

Woodland in Beauchamps Field. Earlier in the year the Woodland Trust and our volunteers planted 3,500 whips and saplings in Beauchamps Field. As anticipated some have not survived the summer and E Forests have now provided 300 lovely healthy whips free of charge, together with stakes and tubes to replace some of those that have died. Mark, the Manager of Wickford Co operative arranged for a group of Co Operative Managers to plant the new whips on Wednesday 20th October 2021 The group are of course very grateful for all the help that is offered.



The Home Front Garden is an ongoing project. The garden has looked very beautiful and we have received many compliments on the lovely colourful display. The garden was planted with a wonderfully diverse selection of plants and shrubs and bark mulch has been added to help retain moisture and suppress the weeds. We are continuing to care for the plants through the autumn and will be adding to the plants so it will continue to give great pleasure for many years to come. The Council will be providing polyanthus which we will be plant in the smaller raised bed, back border and round the trees.



Spring Bulbs. Last spring we planted thousands of bulbs around the park and in the coming weeks we will be planting 10,000 more crocus, snowdrop, native bluebell and daffodil bulbs. We will also be planting bulbs around the Memorial in Runwell Road to replace the daffodils lost when the car park was created.



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 Beacon which was removed from the front of the Memorial to make way for the car park will be re-erected in the arboretum and will be lit for the Queen’s Jubilee in 2022. The Council will replace the dead trees and the group will be planting more spring bulbs to add to those already planted there. We also intend to put some benches and to screen the fence between the arboretum and Carters yard but this may have to wait until next year

Mount Road Entrance. The Council found it necessary to cut down a very large willow tree at the Mount Road entrance to the park. Some of the logs have been moved to other parts of the park and some have been left as informal seating and for the bugs and beetles that find homes in decaying wood. The Council will be adding a large planter to stand on the remains of the tree stump and the Friends have tidied and weeded the area and will be planting bulbs, polyanthus and shrubs.



So far our plans for 2021/2 include :

- ♣ Cut down some of the scrub in various places along the bank of the Crouch to let in the light to encourage plant growth.
- ♣ Continue to care for the Memorial in Runwell Road
- ♣ Continue to remove Himalayan Balsam from the River Crouch
- ♣ Work with the Basildon Bio Diversity Officer (when appointed) to catalogue the wildlife and species of trees in 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
- ♣ Put up bird and bat nesting boxes.
- ♣ Create a native wild flower area in Beauchamps Field
- ♣ Organise more tours of the park to encourage visitors
- ♣ Welcome many more volunteers to our work parties.

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.

