

Working Parties Spring 2010

Three Working Parties were arranged for Spring 2010 planned to coincide with an expected improvement in the weather. We were wrong as when the time came the forecasts were far from good. Cold with wintry showers!

The first two were planned for midweek to hopefully give different BAC members a chance to take part. We met on two Wednesdays in March, the 17th and 31st. The main aim was to sort out rainwater harvesting from the communal huts and toilet and to start putting together the picnic benches which we bought flat-packed and prepare the bases where they would be positioned.

The day of the first session arrived and presented us with a cold morning for working. Five BAC members turned up and we managed to put together two benches and began the site preparation. The two communal huts and the toilet gained guttering, down-pipes and water butts.

Creating the Herb Border and getting some of it planted was a real bonus. This border now boasts lavenders, rosemary, purple sage, chives and marjoram. We hope this becomes a welcoming site as members leave Hut 2 and enter the main path, with enticing scents and the temptation to rub the leaves to release the essential oils. Plenty of room remains for further herb planting.

The forecast for the second session was terrible - temperatures only just above freezing and sleet, hail and snow showers all day. Despite this seven brave souls turned out to help. Our aim was to complete the construction of the six picnic tables and get some into their final positions. We also wanted to mark out all the Green Space projects ready for development.

It was a successful day as we managed to construct the benches and get four of them into their final positions. They certainly looked smart and encouraged us look forward to warmer weather when we could relax there with tea and biscuits when taking well-earned rests from digging.

Almost all of the grass in the Green Spaces was cut with the new BAC

mower and the areas for development marked out. The herb garden had an extra area added to it to afford us more scope for planting and a bay tree now features as a centrepiece. We also made up the new rotary composter which will turn the site's grass cuttings into compost to use on the Green Space areas. Again this reflects our policy of keeping all green "waste" on site and utilising it.

It has to be noted that the success of the day owed much to the scones supplied by Doreen!



The hard work of our first ever BAC Working Party back in the autumn of 2009 pays off, as daffodils come into flower around the car park.

Our third working party of the Spring took place on Saturday 3rd April. Again the weather forecast was not helpful nor encouraging - frosty morning followed by wintry showers. When we opened the site gates just before the planned start time of 9:00 my car registered the temperature as just 2 degrees. However the glow from the daffodils planted at our first ever working party made it feel a little warmer.

A total of 16 volunteers helped out at various times of the day, some staying all day and others managing to give a few hours. It was heartening to see not just plot-holders themselves but also children and grandchildren of plot-holders. Three generations of Philip and Doreen's

family were represented which was wonderful to see.

The day became warmer and brighter and jackets were soon removed and we certainly moved a long way forward with the development of the Green Spaces. New features are now much in evidence. Our aims for the enhancement of the Green Spaces are coming to fruition.



Digging out the base for one of the picnic benches.

The final picnic benches are now in place and help give a welcoming feeling to the site. We can look forward to better weather which will allow us the luxury of time to sit, enjoy a break for coffee and biscuits, a quiet read of one of the magazines or books from the BAC library in Hut 2 or even a secret snooze! The benches are sited where everyone has easy access to them and where the planting can be appreciated and wildlife observed.

Each bench is situated on an area of bark over a weed-suppressing membrane and the area is edged with wooden boarding to reduce maintenance. Although this made the task of fixing them much more difficult it will pay off in the long run.

When the benches were sourced we made sure that the wood was felled from Forestry Stewardship Scheme woodland and that the wood was

treated with environmentally friendly preservatives. With safety in mind we ensured that all edges were chamfered and corners rounded off.



The picnic area under the old oak tree.

We came a long way with the planting of the hedge along the pool side of the site. We planted about 500 plants - hawthorn, guelder rose, hazel and field maple. The constitution of the hedge is designed to reflect the sort of natural hedge we historically expected to see on British farmland. It is based on Hawthorn as the main shrub with smaller numbers of the other species.



Making a start on planting the hedge.

The main purposes of the hedge are to act as a wind-break, attract wildlife and present a more attractive boundary line than the existing metal security fence. The Field Maples and the two Oak will be left to grow as specimen trees. We hope that as the hedge becomes established its roots will also alleviate the poor drainage at that end of the site. Full details of the role of hedging at BAC can be found by clicking on the link on our website. All the plants, canes and protective tubes were obtained free of charge from the county council via a Tree Council grant.

Over the following week work on the unfinished projects continued as BAC Committee members planted more fruit trees, added more material to the insect hotels and removed more of the turf from the Buddleia Beds.



Pete planting apple trees in the orchard area.

The orchard areas are now planted with mostly apple trees with some pear, plum and soft fruit. In the future cherries, crab apple, quince, fig and medlar will be added. The varieties of apple were selected using several criteria including age of variety, place of origin and interesting names. Full details of the varieties will be posted on the website.

The larger orchard area has a picnic bench sited within it which will become a shaded retreat as the trees mature. We shall rely on natural predators as the main means of pest-control, so we have constructed insect stacks and log-piles in both of the orchard areas. We will also place pheromone traps in the trees to prevent attack from fruit moths.

The larger orchard is planted with trees grafted onto Rootstock MM106 which will determine their final height of between 12ft and 15ft whereas the smaller orchard is planted with trees grown on Rootstock M9 which will limit their ultimate height to just 8ft.



The larger orchard area with seating, log-pile and insect stack.



The second orchard with its insect stack.

The willow dome is destined to become a firm favourite with the younger members of our BAC community.



Jude planting up the willow dome.

To create the willow dome a doughnut shaped area was cleared of turf, dug over and rotavated. When the willow was planted they were treated to a dose of bonemeal in the base of the planting hole and given a thick mulch of chipped bark to retain moisture and help keep weeds at bay.



The willow dome has been designed to be of interest and enjoyment to the children of plot-holders' children, grandchildren and young visitors. It will be a place to shelter and play. Children today rarely get the chance to experience playing in dens!

The willow cuttings will be trained over the area as they grow to create a "yurt" shaped arbour and will be regularly trimmed. The turf removed to create the planting "doughnut" shape has been re-used in the form of a turf seat. This reflects our policy of trying to re-cycle and re-use all green material and remove none from the site. The central area was surfaced later with a layer of chipped wood, which was sourced from the tree surgery performed on the trees around the pond, again reflecting the above policy.



John and his son Ben use turf from the borders to make good the central path.



Julia and Pete begin work on the Spring Garden.

When the turf was removed to create the picnic bench site under the oak tree and the Spring Border, it was barrowed off to repair the damaged central path. Turf removed while siting the picnic bench nearer the pond was used to create a turf spiral maze. In the end no turf was wasted but it was all re-used on projects on site.



The spiral turf maze (above) and the Spring Garden (below)



Near the oak tree two new gardens were prepared ready for planting, the Young Explorers' Garden and the Spring Garden. The Spring Garden represents the first of the gardens to reflect the four seasons. Four trees were planted in this garden, two flowering cherries, a flowering crab apple and a decorative willow. Around the trees we have planted hellebores, cowslips, and primulas and in the future other herbaceous plants and bulbs will be added.



The Young Explorers' Garden

The Young Explorers' Garden is based around native shrubs donated by the Young Explorers' pre-school group. This is now planted up with the hollies, wild roses, dogwoods and hazels. The idea of developing this garden into a border of the senses resulted in a "Greensleeves" apple tree and various herbaceous plants being added. Lots of planting is planned of plants that are interesting to touch, smell, taste and create sounds. For touch we will choose plants with soft, rough, spiky or prickly leaves,

In the weeks that followed our three working parties work continued as committee members met to get the first Buddleia border underway. John our Chairman, Julia, Jude and I completed the preparation of the area and made a good start on the planting.



Our BAC working parties are hard work but great fun. They provide the opportunity for members to give something back to the allotment community. If you have never helped at a working party please consider doing so. Keep an eye out for notices on the info boards and e-mails from me.

The next few working parties will take place in the evening to give those members who work a chance to join us.

(Malc Mollart on behalf of Green Spaces Committee 12th April 2010)