

Friends of the Meadows & Bruntsfield Links

ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

Meadows Mural

We can report one real achievement this year: the production of our Meadows Mural, which went up on the back of the wall belonging to the Scottish Power electricity sub-station at the intersection of Middle Meadow Walk and North Meadow Walk. This wall had been a favourite location for graffiti. The Council proposed erecting an advertisement hoarding to prevent graffiti. We thought we could do better, applied for a grant from the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership, which was matched by Scottish Power, and we commissioned the artist Astrid Jaekel and the poet Rachel Woolf to work on a mural that would reflect something of the history and culture of the Meadows. We are delighted with the result. Children from James Gillespie's Primary School planted cotoneasters along the foot, which will eventually cover the bottom metre of wall, to finally eliminate graffiti from the whole site. We are pleased to report that the artwork has weathered well and has not been defaced.

Events on the Meadows

This year the system for financing large events on the east Meadows during the Festival Fringe has changed to one of bidding for this prime position. While community groups are consulted about plans for all smaller events, and asked to make comments on any issues of concern, the bidding process has eliminated this, and we were only alerted to the final outcome by the press, who learned before we did that Underbelly had outbid the Ladyboys of Bangkok. Underbelly (an international circus) made a presentation to the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership on 8th June, from which we learned that the entertainment would last until 11.45 pm and the site not closed until midnight.

The event will last for a month, so the same issues with the recovery of the site afterwards will no doubt occur. Members are asked to keep a close watch on the event, and note any issues of concern. A much more economic rent will be paid than before, but there is still no sign that the increased revenue will go back into Park services such as extended hours for Park rangers during the summer, since they still clock off at 4 pm on Saturdays and Sundays. We continue to campaign for large events to last no longer than a fortnight, as in other Edinburgh parks.

Volunteering

Our volunteers have continued to meet monthly, on the last Saturday of each month, and this year has seen some encouraging developments. In the autumn term on four weekday mornings we were delighted to work with classes of 10-year-olds from George Heriot's school, who diligently weeded round the sundial and under benches, supervised by their own teachers and parents. We have also been joined on Saturdays in the spring by students from Edinburgh University, who gained funding from the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership for their eVOLve project. They made a huge difference to our manpower. We have worked at both ends of the Meadows, Hope Park and Bruntsfield, mainly tidying grass verges and filling in bare patches, including barbecue burns, either with the turf thereby collected or planting new seed. We have also 'feathered' trees, and recently we have planted wildflower seeds in hollow tree stumps. This work will continue.

Whalebone Arch

As you will all know, the bones were removed last year for conservation. Funding has finally been found to complete the work, and we look forward to welcoming the bones back into their traditional position in October.

Charitable Status

Our secretary has been working hard on completing the final paperwork required to fulfil the requirements for SCIO status, and we hope to hear that this has been successful when she reports to our AGM.

Barbecues

Most regrettably, in spite of hard work in distributing the Council's leaflet on 'responsible barbecue use' to many local supermarkets, and also to groups of picnickers in the Meadows, members of the public continue to burn the grass with 'instant' barbecues. We need to decide whether we should campaign for barbecues to be banned, as in many other parks.

Public meetings

We have held three public meetings during the year. At our AGM on 21 June 2014 we had an interesting talk from Jennifer Thomson about her work on the theme 'Designing and managing green space for health', which is the subject of her PhD thesis.

In the autumn, meeting at the German Church, Chalmers Crescent, on 11 November 2014, we heard a talk from Chris Wigglesworth about the geology of the Meadows: a fascinating account that shed light on some of our current issues with drainage.

In the spring, on 16 February 2015, we met at the Barclay Viewforth Church, and enjoyed a musical celebration of our Meadows Mural, which includes pictures or mentions of several musical instruments. The mostly young musicians played us pieces of their own choice on these instruments - bugle, fiddles, accordion, pipe, and clarsach. We could not find a balalaika player, but Timothy Kunitsky from the Russian consulate kindly brought one along and talked about it. Rachel Woolf, the poet who had contributed the words for the mural, also came and talked about her work. Then followed round-table discussions where members were able to bring forward personal concerns about Meadows matters.

Meadows and Bruntsfield Links Advisory Group

This group, which is a sub-group of the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership, consists of representatives from both the Council and community groups, including those community councils surrounding the Meadows: Merchiston, Tollcross, Marchmont & Sciennes, and the Southside Association. It meets quarterly, and has done some useful liaison work. At a recent meeting the three advertisement drums that have appeared on the Meadows during the last year were discussed, and with one exception those present voted that they should be taken down, as unsuitable for their setting. However, at a subsequent vote at the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership this was overturned. We are not happy about this, and we are asking for this decision to be reviewed.

Committee meetings

Your committee has continued to meet regularly. Sadly our Treasurer, Jennifer Thomson, has reluctantly had to stand down owing to pressure of work: she is now fully occupied in completing her PhD thesis. We thank her warmly for taking over at a time when we really needed her, and we welcome Ron Carr, who has very kindly accepted the baton from her.

Website

Philip McDowell continues to administer and edit our website, and we are tremendously grateful to him for doing a thoroughly professional job on our behalf.

Membership

Our membership has remained more or less constant during the past year. This time last year I suggested that each member could recruit one more member, but obviously members have not risen to the challenge. Perhaps this year, at a time when as never before we need to preserve and maintain our beautiful park, you will all take this challenge more seriously.

Heather Goodare (Convener), June 2015