



*Daisy Bank*

*Pocket Park*

*Aston le Walls' own nature reserve*

Report to Aston le Walls Parish Council 13 July 2017

As some of you will be aware the Daisy Bank project was commenced in 1993 with the park being officially opened in July 1994. The pocket park project was instigated as it was felt that Aston le Walls had very few of the open air amenities which one almost expects to find in a rural community. There is no village green, no playing field, no wooded areas and only a few public footpaths. Indeed all the footpaths cross arable land or intensively farmed grassland. Despite being a small community surrounded by countryside there was nowhere that the local people could have contact with nature. Daisy Bank Pocket Park provides a place to enjoy the countryside and relieve some of life's stress with some glorious views, particularly of the sunset over the Dassett hills. It also provides a refuge for wild life from modern agriculture and the opportunity for local people to learn about and become involved in conservation and ecology, also providing a safe place for children to play. Since the opening of the Pocket Park many improvements have been made by volunteers including laying of stone paths, creation of steps and pond and planting of the new hedge together with many native trees, shrubs and flowering plants.

In the early days work in the park was supported by a group of approximately 13 people; since then, despite the efforts of the management group, numbers have dwindled to 5 regulars. Tim and I have been involved for the entirety of the project and leadership of the group has fallen to us. Until recently we both worked full time and although able to give our time to practical work in the park have not been able to commit extra time to raising awareness within the local community and improving public engagement. We hope to be able to give more time to this in the future. Due mainly to time constraints we have not been able to consider any major improvements or developments in the park, devoting our time to ongoing general maintenance to keep the park open and available to its many users. For this time we have managed with very little financial support from the Parish Council, or elsewhere, just covering the running and maintenance of the mower and strimmer and occasional other small purchases. The last major expenditure would have been the purchase of the current mower which was made on the understanding that the Management Group would undertake mowing of paths within the park. We also used to receive financial support for the employment of an outside contractor to make an annual cut of the park meadows. Unfortunately this has not been possible for a number of years as it is not possible for larger machinery to access the park.

The Management Group is now able to consider undertaking some more substantial work in the park that will require additional financial support from the Parish Council, and/or external funding which is why I am talking to you today.

Going back to the annual cutting of the meadows, most recently this has been done jointly by volunteers using hand tools and the pocket park mower. I am aware that there is a conversation between the Charles, Chair of the Parish Council and Tim Ball in relation to alternatives, such as the use of an Allen Scythe although I am not clear whether the access issues would remain. I am not sure of the financial implications of this plan so have not included any figure in my presentation this evening.

Realistically we have two projects we would like you to consider agreeing to support financially.

The first is in relation to the hedge in the lower meadow on the boundary between the park and the neighbouring fields. The hedge was planted in 1995 and layed during a training session in the traditional style in 2005. There are a number of benefits associated with re-laying the hedge as follows:

This creates a dense bushy hedge which:

- Creates ideal habitat for small mammals and birds
- Prolongs the life of the hedge by reviving the shrubs/trees
- Laying in the local style adds to the character of the landscape
- Allows light in to the base of the hedge to promote wildflowers, which are of benefit to pollinating insects
- It also forms a stock proof barrier – although this is not such a concern in our situation.

Another benefit is that it would make the hedge easier for the current volunteer group to manage over the coming years.

We have considered undertaking this project ourselves and are agreed that due to our time constraints, lack of skills and lack of the necessary tools this would not be possible. I have obtained a quote from Rebecca Mayes, Reserves Officer with the Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust, for her and a colleague to re-lay the hedge sometime over the coming winter. The price quoted includes all supplies that would be needed to lay 40M of hedge, together with the time provided by Rebecca and her colleague. This price relies on volunteers 'prepping' the hedge prior to the session – which we have agreed to do. The intention is to use this as an activity training session with members of the local community being invited to volunteer their time. We hope this would have two-fold benefits in that it could engage the local community with the park and, if we can reduce the time taken to complete the task, the cost will be reduced accordingly. The quote we have received is for £560 and having researched this we are in agreement that we are being offered a very reasonable price.

The second piece of work that we need your help with is to improve the boundary fence between the park and the eventing yard, adjacent to the pond. The volunteers have attempted many times to construct a dog-proof barrier in this area. Unfortunately we have not been successful. I am currently trying to source quotes to have this rectified with stock proof wire fencing; I would appreciate any suggestions of local contractors I could approach. There are certainly a number of suitable concrete or metal posts in situ – more may be needed, but again, we feel that we do not have the skills or the tools to undertake this work ourselves.

I am here today to ask if you would be prepared to cover the cost of all, or part of the hedge laying and to consider paying for the stock fence to be replaced when we have prices available. I do not expect an answer to this question this evening – although I do hope you will consider it. More urgently I do need the information requested in a recent email as I also plan to apply for a share of the community funding offered by the Coop, Waitrose and Tesco.