

EAST GRINSTEAD MEMORIAL ESTATE

DECEMBER 2022 NEWSLETTER

This could be viewed as a starchy, albeit important subject to open a newsletter, but when I wrote at this time last year I reported on the Governance review undertaken by the Board – so what's happened since? I mentioned we had decided to focus on the heading of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and we have made good progress in refreshing the Board with four new Directors recruited over the year, including a new Treasurer, two professionals from the arboricultural (a new word to me 12 months ago!) sector and a long-time neighbour and member of the charity. In addition, we are working on a communication project with two Sixth Form students from Imberhorne, both of whom have attended Board meetings as advisers and brought challenge to our traditional perspectives. Our average age has been reduced significantly!

Mid Sussex District Council developments

A steering meeting with representatives from MSDC, EGTC, the Ashplats Conservation Group and ourselves met on 16 September at which I'm pleased to report that we achieved a meeting of minds on the major issue of the last couple of years which has been the width and viability of the Holtie Track as an access route for contractors and their equipment to enable a resumption of woodland maintenance and coppicing. The proposal agreed by MSDC is that they will maintain the track at 3.5metres width and will also secure the stacking areas for enabling transportation of the log 'harvest'. The council still has the galvanised temporary roadway purchased last year which would enable winter coppicing as necessary and gave a commitment to secure the 3.5 metre width before the end of this year as a positive statement of intent.

There is a new plan out for consultation written by English Woodlands which focuses on Ashplats Wood in particular (a limitation that is acknowledged) which is an attempt to structure a more realistic programme of maintenance for the medium term. We have subsequently provided detailed feedback on the plan

That said, the key point about the plan is firstly, has it been costed, and secondly, has the financial and human resource been secured to deliver - as many have said, we have seen pretty plans before that have failed at the delivery stage. Our acceptance of the plan can only be against the costing and resourcing being secured and these aspects are work in progress at MSDC

As for other matters, the update from MSDC was:

- Green Flag status retained for another year
- Bins upgraded around the site
- Pavilion sewage works have just about being completed including making good the green areas
- Nursery at capacity - good news
- Increasing number of football teams using the playing fields
- Aeration works scheduled for the winter
- Meadows to be cut and collected
- Boardwalk plans intend to focus on Ghyll steps and Badgers Walk - these will be shared with us. (Intention is to construct from wood but we recommended they look

at longer lasting materials such as recycled plastics and to let us know if there were expense issues - we may need to consider making a financial contribution if we believe plastic is a more sustainable longer-term solution)

- A small trial of Forest bathing has started

We seem to have reached a meeting of minds on the Holtye track issues which should enable us to move forward

As an aside, we did raise the issue of the public footpaths and signage deteriorating (largely a West Sussex problem but falling between stools) - they have undertaken to report to WSCC to initiate action

There was also an action taken by MSDC to look into stimulating volunteer resource to help bolster resource levels with the Conservation volunteers. In addition, there was a follow up meeting to walk the site on 20th October at which more detailed discussion occurred covering:

- Clearing vegetation at side of McIndoe path
- Public need to be more informed/made aware of the value of the site eg topology, geology, ecology, history
- Grassland needs to be more sensitively managed for wildlife eg fungi and insects
- We need to see how the English Woodlands plan integrates with the whole-site plan going forward
- Future planning needs to embrace access options for, say, wheelchair users
- The boardwalk plans should embrace the Ghyll Steps which are increasingly hazardous despite concerted efforts this year to improve
- Boundary policing needs reasserting

As ever, much to do but there are signs of progress – key is the submission that MSDC have now made of a planning application to address some of the overhang issues on the Holtye Track (which has been a bugbear for quite a while). Additionally, the announcement by MSDC of their advance of funding to develop, in addition to ourselves, a further SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) at the Hill Place Farm development on the Turners Hill Road may present opportunities for scaling up and enhancing the SANG maintenance capability in the town.

Nature notes - Ancient Trees

I thought you might be interested in an extract from an e-mail exchange between Directors in which Mike Funnell commented:

Two (or maybe three) "interesting" trees at East Court are the Wild Service trees in the hedgerow that runs alongside the Sussex Border Path from the lake to just below the entrance to Estcots Drive.

There are also 2 (or 3?) planted in the mansion area, but they are not veteran of course. Not now a very common native tree possibly because of global warming, as it does not seem to give rise to persistent saplings. This tree supposedly gives its name to Chequers pubs because a drink called chequers was made from the (hard) berries.

We have Chequer Mead in East Grinstead ie Chequer tree meadow. Presumably had a chequer tree(s) at one time. It's possible these trees may have been more common in the past, but they seem uncommon now and East Court is lucky to have a specimen, that's been here for years.



The Wild Service tree is the one with leaves turning colour (view from the pavilion car park looking towards Estcotts Drive)



Wild Service Autumn leaves



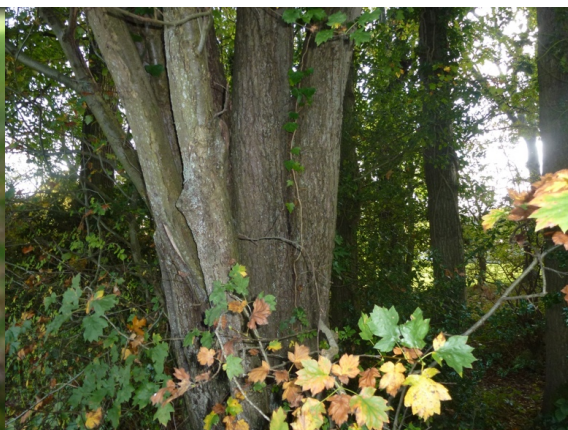
Wild Service summer colours



Berries of the Wild Service (but no seeds evident)



A bud for next years growth



Multiple stems because it's been coppiced in the past

Another rather curious large shrub/small tree in Ashplats is Alder Buckthorn as it's now known, rather than Black Dogwood. There is one largish one close to the top glade on the sandstone, and a few scattered small plants in the part of Rutland Meadow that is now covered in mainly self-seeded oaks badly gnawed by grey squirrels. These would be

on mainly clay. The leaves are the food for the yellow Brimstone butterfly larvae and a heavily flowering one can be buzzing with insects.

I don't know of other examples of these two species at East Court – unless of course you know different!

In Conclusion

In closing, may I thank you all for your support this year and wish you and yours the very best for Christmas and the New Year.

Lloyd Richards

Chairman

Stop Press

On behalf of MSDC, County Tree Surgeons (CTS) will be carrying out tree maintenance and path widening works along the Holtye Track. The work will start from 6 December 2022 and is anticipated to take four days, weather permitting. Pedestrian access should be maintained throughout