

Gardens Report 2024

After a very wet and dreary winter it is, at times, beginning to feel as though spring is on its way, and around the Landings estate the spring bulbs are starting to provide some welcome splashes of colour.

The attractive appearance of the estate is not in small part due to the combined efforts of residents at our annual autumn and spring work parties and I would like to thank everyone who turned out to help in October and last Saturday. In the last year we have managed, for example, to reduce much of the bramble growth along the river bank in Blackburn Way. The brambles provide a great habitat for wildlife, but they do need to be kept under control.

The flower bed alongside the boundary wall in Waterside Close has been brought back to life with the addition of our home-grown compost and with plants donated by residents. It now looks a lot more attractive and is much better maintained.

In the autumn work party last year we cleared the extensive bramble growth from the fence between the rear of Blackburn Way and the woodland. This area had been neglected for many years so we reclaimed about 3 or 4 metres of land in our task to rediscover the fence and the original gate. As part of the renewal work on the gravel paths, the old gravelled path that had led aimlessly to that back gate was dug up and returned to grass and so the end of the Blackburn Way common area is now a lovely green lawn, just crying out for picnics and summer games. Thanks to Simon and David in particular for leading this reclamation project.

Last summer and autumn we trialed a system with the contract gardeners by drawing up a list of priority tasks for each season, to try to establish a fixed standard of care for all parts of the estate. In general this system worked well although the vagaries of the British summer weather did mean that there were still times when the grass was just growing too fast for them to keep up with the task for all parts of the estate in their contracted two-hours each week.

However, since the gravel paths have been upgraded their tasks have become a great deal easier as they no longer have to regularly divert to weeding the paths. The only additional work the upgrade has caused is to make sure that all the leaves are cleared from the gravel in the autumn and winter and so avoid creating a growing medium for weeds.

I continue to keep a close eye on the small areas of Japanese Knotweed that still exist on the estate but can reassure residents that it is not a cause for concern and that the small areas where it is still growing, are contained and responding to regular treatment. I am grateful to those residents who live close to the knotweed hot spots for being my eyes and ears and letting me know when the shoots appear.

We all appreciate the privilege of living in this beautiful natural environment where we are completely surrounded by water. The wildlife definitely appreciates the more natural habitat on our side of the river as opposed to the featureless river banks opposite the houses on Blackburn Way that have been stripped of any ground cover. I know that some residents like to try to beautify the river banks outside their properties but I do reiterate my plea that you resist the temptation to clear the banks of

undergrowth. This is becoming more important as the changing climate means that we are subject to ever more frequent and dramatic rises in river levels. This is particularly noticeable in Waterside Close where over the winter the river level has risen dramatically and rapidly on several occasions following sustained rainfall. Anything that is left on the bank, such as ornaments or compost bins can easily be washed away and result in clogged weirs further downstream. Equally important is the need to maintain strong root systems of vegetation on all of the banks, in order to avoid sudden erosion and bank collapse. Your cooperation is very much appreciated.

Lastly the woodland is an important natural asset to the estate. The stream now has a vigorous flow and David and I carry out regular Riverfly surveys to monitor the occurrence and numbers of key species that indicate the health of the watercourse. Since last August we have joined a growing network of Water Rangers who carry out monthly analysis of the water quality in the River Wey and its catchment area. David and I take our readings in the stream that runs through the woodland. Our readings are fed into a database that provides up to the minute proof of the health, or otherwise, of the river and can identify and pinpoint any unwanted outfalls.

Finally, some of you might not be aware that there is a compost heap behind the garage block in the middle of Blackburn Way. This is only to be used by the gardeners to dispose of garden waste from the common areas on the estate and we ask that residents do not dispose of their garden refuse here . However, it is a good, source of rich compost and it is free ,so if you have a spade and a wheelbarrow please do make use of it to spread on your gardens.

We hope that 2024 will be a good year so that we can all enjoy the privilege of living in this lovely little corner of Godalming.