Portfolio for Leamington in Bloom 2015

Introduction

Royal Leamington Spa has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Royal Horticultural Society’s ‘In Bloom’ event for over 30 years, entering the Heart of England Campaign’s Large Town Category. During that time the Town has won many accolades in the competition for its splendid parks and gardens, residential and business areas. In the past five years the town has won five Gold Awards (2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012 and 2013) emphasising the quality of the input from the Leamington in Bloom Committee and its many supporters. In 2014, for the first time in many years, the Town did not submit an entry in recognition of the fact that due to its growing population, it had been elevated to the “small city” category.

At the heart of Royal Leamington Spa, the Jephson Gardens, the jewel in Leamington’s crown, are true pleasure grounds which have been delighting visitors and local residents for over 160 years. They are a welcoming retreat in our lively Regency town, with stunning floral displays, soothing fountains, birds and squirrels, spacious lawns and promenades, all framed by a collection of fine trees. Jephson Gardens were awarded the title of ‘Best Park in Britain’ in 2004 by the Royal Horticultural Society and continue to maintain that high standard. Jephson Gardens are the civic and horticultural centrepiece of the unique Leamington Spa Gardens, a sequence of green spaces including Victoria Park and the Royal Pump Room Gardens along the River Leam, planned in the late 19th century. Mill Gardens was the last to be created, in 1903, forming one riverside landscape with Jephson Gardens.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has supported not only the restoration of historic structures, such as the ornate Victorian tearoom, but also the contemporary new restaurant, teaching studio, and sub-tropical glasshouse on the site of a redundant nursery. Exhibitions and publications tell the story of plants and the history of the Gardens. The refurbishment of the boat house in Mill Gardens, the reintroduction of boating and a new play area offer facilities which complement those of Jephson Gardens.

In 2007 Jephson Gardens received the prestigious ‘Green Flag Award’ which is awarded, by the Department of Communities and Local Government in recognition of the high environmental standard achieved. We have successfully continued to win this annual Award, which acclaims the Gardens as a benchmark of excellence in recreational green areas.

The Town is a Green Heritage Site winner. Green Heritage Site status is sponsored by English Heritage and promotes the value of, and best practice in, the care and upkeep of parks and open spaces in England that are of local or national historic interest. In 2000 the Green Apple Silver Award was awarded to Royal Leamington Spa in recognition of the restoration work carried out on the Royal Pump Room Baths and Assembly Room which was completed in 1999. The award was created in 1994 and all winners are recognised for their contribution to the built environment and architectural heritage.

The annual ‘Leamington in Bloom’ campaign is run by a Committee made up of volunteers representing local horticultural interest and neighbourhood resilience. There are currently 9 members of the Committee.

The Committee works in partnership with local Community Groups such as the Sydni Community Centre, Brunswick Healthy Living Centre and the Chain in Lillington giving advice and support both to the organisations and to their customers and helpers.

Local primary and senior Schools are invited to participate in events during the year and to take part in schemes organised nationally by the RHS and regionally by Heart of England in Bloom. Many schools have ongoing gardening projects which are supported by ‘Leamington in Bloom’ and in 2010 St Paul’s Primary School won the Heart of England In Bloom School Involvement Award. Local residents and organisations have won individual awards both for their splendid contributions locally to ‘Leamington in Bloom’ and in national competitions run by publications such as ‘Garden News’.
In particular GALS – Gardening Around Leamington Spa – received a very special accolade in 2012 – The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service, in recognition of their work in identifying and improving selected Public Open Spaces. Several residents open their gardens for viewing under the National Open Gardens Scheme which is often complemented by a similar scheme run by the ‘Leamington in Bloom’ Committee.

Royal Leamington Spa Town Council and Warwick District Council offer financial and administrative support to the Committee by providing funding for specific projects and resources for planting and general maintenance throughout the year. The Town Council, in particular, financially supports the ‘Leamington in Bloom’ Committee and meets the administrative and other costs of the annual ‘In Bloom’ campaign. The Town Council has also recently funded the refurbishment of the public seating situated along Parade and Warwick Street.

Large projects such as the regeneration of Jephson Gardens and the refurbishment of the Linden Arches in the Royal Pump Rooms are supported by both central and local government and charitable grants which require matched funding. In addition the Town Council and Leamington BID, which represents local businesses in the town centre, provide funding to enhance planting schemes throughout the town, particularly the provision of hanging baskets down the Parade.

The Leamington in Bloom Committee
2015

Robert Nash
Acting Chair & Treasurer Royal Leamington Spa Town Council

Jim Dean
Secretary and member of “Friends of The Dell”.

Annabel Rainbow
Local Resident and former founding Member of the GALS

Peter Bailey
Lillington CHAIN Community Office

George Dunkley
Representing Old Town

Cllr Heather Calver
Deputy Mayor and Member of Royal Leamington Spa Town Council

Jackie Parker
Winner of LIB Large Garden Category for two years

Simon Wheeler
Local Resident and former Chairman of Leamington in Bloom

Jonathan Huxley, Neighbourhood Services, Warwick District Council
Review of the Past Year

Notwithstanding the decision to take a year out from active competition, the Leamington in Bloom Committee continued to promote a comprehensive range of activities locally during 2014.

These included:-

Domestic Garden Competition – Judging 16th June- 21st July 2014

Entries were invited from local residents living in and around Royal Leamington Spa for the 5 Categories of residential dwellings with interest from over 50 entrants. Awards of Overall Winner, Gold, Silver and Highly Commended were made (see Appendix1)

Above: Staff at the James Hirons Care Home
Below: Overall winner Balcony & Patio

Commercial Premises – July 2014

Commercial properties in and around Leamington Town Centre are not required to ‘enter’ a competition. Local businesses including pubs, clubs, hotels, restaurants, places of worship, shops and offices in prime locations are identified by local residents and are judged by members of the Committee. Certificates and trophies similar to those for the Domestic Gardens Competition are awarded.

Open Gardens – August 2014

Annually held on the 1st Sunday in August to encourage and inspire our budding gardeners and to raise money for the benefit of local charities.

Included are a variety of gardens from small courtyards to large gardens with hosts at the ready to answer questions, imparting the wisdom of experience and to share their enthusiasm.
Some gardens offered refreshments, while others sold plants and held a raffle. The committee donated the proceeds of over £670 to the Warwickshire Air Ambulance Service.

Leamington in Bloom Awards Evening – 5th September 2014

Our Awards evening was held at the Town Hall and was well attended. Speeches from the Mayor of Royal Leamington Spa and Chairman of Warwick District Council were well received and all recipients of awards photographed. A splendid event and a suitable finale to our 2014 competition.

Foundry Wood Celebration Day 22nd June

ARC CIC held a community woodland fair on site from 11am -5pm. A bring and share picnic was followed by woodland walks, woodland craft demonstrations and workshops. There were information stalls and live music. Members of the public were invited to see just how much has already been achieved and to appreciate the wildlife and conservation improvements in place.

Winter in Royal Leamington Spa

The Wishing Tree proved very popular with children
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Horticultural Achievement
Chelsea Flower Show – 20-24th May, 2014

In 2014 the town of Royal Leamington Spa exhibited at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. This ambitious project drew on the superb skills of multiple Chelsea Gold award winning Floral Designer, Sarah Horne and award winning Garden Designer, Debbie Cooke and assisted with funding from BID Leamington, a not-for-profit business led partnership in Royal Leamington Spa and the Town Council achieved the distinction of a silver award for an innovative creation that embodied the Town’s association with association with beautiful gardens. The design captured the essence of the town with its sophisticated Regency exterior, its unique individual character and its artistic, cultural and theatrical interior.

The exhibit has now brought Chelsea home to Leamington and will be located in Jephson Gardens at a specially selected site.

The horticultural displays throughout the town and our parks continue to impress both local people and the many visitors to Royal Leamington Spa. The colourful baskets set against the predominantly white buildings are very much in keeping with the historic nature of

Spring in Royal Leamington Spa

Our Geranium Trains were launched on the 1st July 2014 – for details see page 16
the town centre and its rich architectural heritage, drawing the eye upwards.

On the other hand areas of planting at street level have continued to evolve towards a more sustainable style.

**Jephson Gardens**, a haven within the town, continues the traditional planting theme appropriate to their historic pleasure garden status, but there are areas within the park which give way to a naturalistic scheme.

The area down to the rear of the Gardens, approaching the boating lake has a different feel.

Grasses and foliage are used to beautiful effect.
**Portfolio for Leamington in Bloom 2015**

**The Green Spaces along the River Leam**

**Jephson Gardens**

First laid out in 1831 as informal riverside walks along the River Leam, the original Newbold Gardens were developed into formal pleasure grounds after 1846 in honour of Dr Henry Jephson, who had promoted the town as a Spa. Jephson Gardens gained renown for its band concerts, archery and tennis, illuminations, trees and flowers. It is listed as Grade II on the English Heritage register of historic parks and gardens.

Originally the settling beds for the town’s water supply, Mill Gardens was created as part of improvements to the River Leam in 1901-03, which created one riverside landscape. Mill Bridge and the boat house were also constructed at this time.

Like many parks, Jephson Gardens fell into slow decline after World War II. It was restored by Warwick District Council in the early 2000s thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of over £3 million. The Victorian gardens are now complemented by a modern Glasshouse and restaurant and the old aviary offers a welcome chance to enjoy a coffee or ice cream.

The adaptability of these Gardens to change is illustrated by the following new initiatives conducted in 2014:-

**The Sensory Garden**

- New planting to embrace all the senses
- Includes tasting Garden with raspberries, blackberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants and chives

**East Lodge Garden**

This is being developed into a bee friendly environment and will provide the home to the award winning design gazebo entered at the RHS Flower Show at Chelsea. This project was supported by 80 local businesses and co-ordinated by BID Leamington Ltd. Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers are actively involved in the project and will manage the bee hives after installation. An educational video is to be prepared and will be shown to visitors to the Glasshouse to encourage greater footfall at the East Lodge.

- Project Sunflower – over 500 dwarf sunflower plugs grown on by children from 10 schools in the Town and immediate area. The bed will be planted with interactive plants on an annual basis to encourage a “hands on” experience for children.
- Innovative “hands on” features to encourage user interaction such as ‘xylophone’ and ‘mirrored arch’
- Plant demonstration area, that will change each year- currently ‘teasel’
- An imaginative garden design incorporating insect pollinator friendly plants and bug homes.
Newbold Comyn

This extensive park, over 120 hectares (300 acres), was laid out in the 1970’s. Formerly Newbold Comyn Farm, it was acquired by Leamington Corporation in 1943. The northern half is an 18-hole pay-and-play golf course; the southern half provides for recreation, sport and wildlife. The old farmhouse is now a pub, the Newbold Comyn Arms. Newbold Comyn Leisure Centre has a 33 metre swimming pool and children’s fun pool, Pyramids fitness suite, café and other facilities.

Things to enjoy

Walks and rides: Paths, tracks and woodland rides. Riverside walk to Leamington and Warwick. Shared foot and cycle paths link to Radford Road, Campion Hills and Town Centre. Horse-riding route and field.

Wildlife: Leam Valley local nature reserve, Wetland area with hide; woodland, meadow and riverbank habitats. Volunteer work parties help manage the reserve.

Food and drink: Picnic area with barbecues. Café in the Leisure Centre for drinks and hot and cold snacks.

Children’s play: All-ages play areas near Observation Hill car park. Toddlers’ area at Newbold Comyn Arms. Kite-flying from Observation Hill. Model aircraft flying from designated area. Sledging from Observation Hill.

Biking, boarding and blading: New purpose-built area near Observation Hill car park.


Sports: Football, Rugby, Cricket, Rounders.

Welches Meadow and Leam Valley

Welches Meadow and the Leam Valley Local Nature Reserves are situated in Newbold Comyn Country Park.

An area of the Comyn managed for wildlife

Information board on footpath leading along the Leam Valley Nature Reserve
Welches Meadow, a Local Nature Reserve of approximately 17 acres (7 hectares) managed by Warwick District Council, is a low-lying field just south of the River Leam and east of Willes Road. It is not a natural phenomenon but was created in the 19th century as a skating rink. An embankment was heaped up alongside the river and water was allowed to flow in through a sluice in the hope of a freezing winter. In the spring, the water was let out through a drain, (which remains today), taking the water under Willes Road and back into the Leam through a conduit. Even today the drain can block up with leaves and the area becomes a water meadow with great appeal for ducks and swans until the drain is unblocked. When the meadow is dry the eastern end often remains marshy and supports a variety of grasses, reeds and willows. Apart from the footpaths that circumnavigate and cross the area, the grass is mown only once a year while the perimeter verge is left untouched resulting in a profusion of wild flowers through the summer. The Reserve is a good hunting ground for dragonflies, damselflies and butterflies. Large, small and Essex skippers have all been spotted here as well as the more familiar commas, brimstones, ringlets and meadow browns. Local enthusiasts regularly carry out butterfly counts every week from April to September on both Welches Meadow and the Leam Valley Reserve.

When the pool was dug out in the 1990’s, the spoil was deposited near the golf course further west within the reserve, planted with wild flowers and then left uncultivated to form a meadow which attracts a good number of butterflies including marbled white.

The Nature Reserve has now been extended by purchasing two meadows adjacent to the Radford Road Car Park.

Victoria Park

A tree-lined riverside park for families and sport

Victoria Park was opened to mark Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1899 as part of the Corporation’s plan to provide more recreation space for the growing town, especially its children.
Throughout the 19th century it was Leamington’s village green, the venue for galas, military parades, flower shows, circuses and cricket. The riverside path, New River Walk, had been laid out in the early 1860s along the south bank of the River Leam, its winding course smoothed out and widened to speed the flow of its (then) polluted water.

The Borough Engineer, William de Normanville, skillfully created the park’s ovoid central space from an odd-shaped site – the perimeter drive was exactly half a mile in length for running. Victoria Park has hosted many events, notably the Royal Show, festivities for the coronation of King George VI and, in 1996, Women’s World Bowls. Victoria Park Bowling Complex is the official home of Women's Bowls in England.

Since 1974 the facilities within Victoria Park have played host to the English Women's Bowling Association’s National Championship. It is also the only venue in the world to have hosted 2 Women's World Bowls Championships in 1996 and 2004 respectively. In 2014 Bowls England held the National Championship here, an event that looks set to continue.

The Bowling Club with its superbly kept greens and its elegant pavilion contribute considerably to the ambience and amenity of Victoria Park, and it is to be noted that there is no entrance charge for members of the public to come in and watch even the most high profile tournaments here. This year has seen the introduction of a new “state of the art” irrigation system which is fully computerised and electronically controlled from a hand set. This system is much more efficient in terms of water consumption and distribution than the old method which basically relied on taking water from the river.

The Pump Room Gardens

Located at the heart of Leamington Spa, the Pump Rooms Gardens were laid out between 1844 and 1903 and are designated as Grade II on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. Approx 5.5 acres in size, the gardens are now maintained by Warwick District Council as a valuable area of open space, taking on the role of the “village green” for informal recreation and enjoyment of local people and visitors to the town. A wide and diverse range of community activities take place in the gardens throughout the year including fun fairs, the annual Peace Festival and the popular Food and Drink Festival each September. In 2014 the Festival attracted over 25,000 visitors to the Town.
The Friends of Pump Room Gardens have launched an appeal to help raise funding for the restoration of the Gardens.

The project is supported by Warwick District Council and Royal Leamington Spa Town Council and is subject to a Heritage Lottery Fund bid of £900,000. The remainder of the £1.1 million needed to complete the Project is to be raised locally- £100,000 having already been secured from local benefactors.

Full details of this ambitious project are included in the Appendix but in summary encompass:

- Restoration of the Bandstand to its original condition
- Improvements to the York Bridge over the River Leam
- New planting of the riverbank to encourage wildlife
- New flowerbeds around the bandstand and at entrances consistent with the original Garden layout
- Improved drainage to resolve waterlogging
- New trees, lighting, seating and pathways

Community Participation

Brunswick Healthy Living Centre- the secret Garden

This project commenced in the late spring 2013 and is on-going.

The Healthy Living Centre (also known as the Brunswick Hub) is a registered Charity whose essential role is the provision of services related to health and well-being. It has a holistic approach with core themes of:

- physical, mental and economic well-being;
- healthy eating;
- information and advice;
- supported living.

Located at the rear of the premises, a largely under used amenity area had become neglected. During early 2014, with a grant from the Town Council for essential equipment, volunteers at the Centre and local residents working under the encouragement and guidance of Jackie Parker of the Leamington in Bloom Committee, set about transforming this area into a tranquil haven.

The Group has taken to the task with great enthusiasm resulting in:

- creation of a public accessible greenspace
- renovation of exiting garden furniture
- introduction to gardening for those with little or no previous experience
Portfolio for Leamington in Bloom 2015

- application of sustainable principles through composting, collection of rainwater and use of recycled garden implements

Sydni Centre

The development of the Community Garden at the Sydni Centre started in 2012. Participants have been reliant on the help and advice of others including Chris Philpott (who manages the Garden Gang at Campion School) and Christine Vick (from the National Herb Centre).

View into the garden behind the Sydni Centre

There are a growing number of community gardening projects in the area and there is a lot to be gained from sharing information, tools, seeds, plants and expertise. Sydni Community Garden already has strong links with St Mary's Church (which has its own allotment), Sydenham School Allotment, Mind Allotment Group and Action 21 (who will be involved during Phase 2 of the project).

The Mind Allotment at St. Mary's

The Grand Union Canal

The Canal, which traverses Leamington East-West, has played a significant part in the development of the Town. This important waterway provides a unique source of leisure and an alternative route through the Town.

Managed by the Canals and Waterways Trust, there has been significant investment in the regeneration of the Tow Path which has involved the local community through the contribution of volunteers from the St Mary's Residents’ Association and members of the University of Warwick Student Union. A press cutting concerning a recent volunteer day is included in the Appendix.

Incredible Edible is now developing its own momentum in Leamington Spa.

Incredible Edible gardens began in Todmorden in West Yorkshire some years ago and have now spread around the world. The basic idea is simple. Members of the community grow vegetables and fruit, usually from donated seeds or stock, on otherwise unworked public land such as verges and traffic islands and the produce is freely available for the passing public to harvest.

But what is the philosophy behind the movement? It is essentially a mission to spread the message that true sustainability depends on individual communities working together to grow food locally. It is strongly educational in its drive to make the general public more aware of the need for local resilience in the face of rising food prices and the global impact of the carbon cost of imported food. Surprisingly, the produce is not all picked at once by "unscrupulous market traders" in the dead of night. Everyone who helps themselves seems to appreciate the importance of the altruistic spirit of the growers.
In Leamington, Incredible Edible gardens have sprung up outside the public toilets in Holly Walk (hence the “Convenience Food Garden”), in Charles Gardner Road, Christine Ledger Square, and North Villiers St. with many more planned.

The SPARKS - Incredible Edible group have their own Committee ably led by Derrick Knight and enthusiastically supported by Town Councillor Janet Alty, Penny Wright and a dozen or so volunteers. Visit them on Facebook: search for “Leamington-Spa-Incredible-Edible”

Community Gardening in Charles Gardner Square

The square was originally landscaped some years ago and then maintained by volunteers – people who have since moved on.

There is no water supply to the area, however plants were surviving but neglected and overgrown.

It was decided that the “greenest” solution was to keep the existing planting, pruning back hard where necessary. All work is carried out by volunteers through the Brunswick Healthy Living Centre, ably marshalled by our own Committee member Jackie Parker. The Group attends a few times each month and the results are plain for all to see. The cutting back of bracken and digging out of grass and weeds has improved the visual appeal of the site. Work is ongoing and it is hoped that as the Square becomes more attractive, interest will grow amongst the community and more residents will become involved.

Leamington Spa Station

The Friends of Leamington Station were formed in 2004 to make the station a good place to start and finish a railway journey for the 2 million or so travellers who use it every year. The restoration of the original gardens was and remains an important part of this aim.

There are, in fact, three gardens. The station is built on an embankment and there is a winding ramp from street up to platform level, with two steeply sloping gardens (terraces) on each side - visible from the roads. There is a further Garden along the platform where the poor soil quality has been supplemented by the composting on site of all cuttings and garden waste.

In 2007 the garden won a national award for being the Best Station garden, and has also won local awards every year since 2006.
Judging for these awards invariably takes place in summer, but there is enough permanent planning for the station gardens to look good all year round. Leamington Spa station garden is the biggest surviving working station in the country: most are now car parks. In 2009 Country Life judged it to be “the best country garden in all Britain” to the surprise and delight of the Friends. Tourists love to photograph themselves in the garden by the running in board to identify their location.

Much of the impetus for these improvements came from local residents who subsequently formed a “Friends” group and Leamington Spa Town Council.

**The Flood Plain – Lillington**

This view gives some impression of the size of the flood plain and the children’s play area that has been incorporated within it.

A large part of the flood plain is left in a natural condition to encourage wildlife to flourish whilst allowing for a sizeable area of mown parkland and the play area for walkers and family recreation.

**Christchurch Gardens**

Much used by local people, particularly office workers in North Leamington, for a lunch break, this is a peaceful little park located at the top of the Parade. The park also has tennis courts for the more energetic. The Garden is included within Warwick District Council’s register of historic open spaces.

The Park was subject to a significant scheme of improvement between the period 2010-2013 with investment in new pathways, fencing and retaining walls and the re-orientation of public access to respect the integrity of the new planting scheme.
Sustainable planting with impact

The move to more permanent planting schemes using a variety of plants from grasses to heucharas, bergenias to red hot pokers etc, with seasonal changes from the addition of dramatic bulbs like large alliums has added impact and interest to more mundane sites like car parks and our roundabouts. These have been introduced in conjunction with gravelled areas, slate chips and more formal hard landscaping and also include irrigation tanks to cut down on maintenance, reducing the amount of water (estimated to be around 50%). However, this is dependent on the weather which has over the last few years been wetter than average.

In our current economic and financial climate there is also benefit to be gained by such long term investment and obvious savings on annual planting with its high reliance on green-housing.
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Leamington Spa War Memorial

Located within the pleasant surroundings of Euston Gardens, the War Memorial is a significant and much loved feature of local life.

Erected in 1922 with later additions and sculpted by Albert Toft of Birmingham, the War Memorial is a Grade II listed monument and consists of a Cornish granite plinth and bronze statue of a life sized figure of a soldier. The plinth is inscribed on four sides, with names of the dead from both World Wars, Korea, the Malaya emergency, Northern Ireland and the Falklands.

In 2012 application was made by Royal Leamington Spa Town Council to the War Memorials Trust to obtain grant funding for the renovation of the Memorial including the complete cleaning and re-lettering of the plinth, resetting into stone of new memorial slabs at the base and re-turfing the perimeter.

This work which was jointly funded with contributions from Warwick District Council and Royal Leamington Spa Town Council, was completed in May 2013.

The Memorial has now been returned to a condition befitting its importance and provides a prominent and dignified focus within the tranquil surroundings of Euston Gardens.

The Geranium Floral Trains

The Geranium Trains are an annual feature of the Leamington in Bloom campaign. The aim is to raise awareness among primary school children to the pleasure of growing plants and seeing them planted in the floral trains in the Jephson Gardens and at the Railway Station. Over 1200 children take part in the project. Their involvement starts in early Spring when they are asked to look after tiny Geranium Plugs and culminates in the launch of the trains in the Jephson Gardens in June/July.
Portfolio for Leamington in Bloom 2015

They are shown how to plant the plugs and to care for them by ensuring they are watered. This is often done as part of the school curriculum and their efforts are rewarded both by a Certificate and an invitation to the Launch where they meet the local Station Master, Members of the Committee and the Mayor of Royal Leamington Spa.

Each school has a named carriage for its plants in each of the two trains – one at Jephson Gardens and the other at the Leamington Spa Railway Station.

Committee members volunteer each year to clean and prepare the trains after they have been stored over winter, in readiness for the arrival of the plants that children have grown in pots at their schools. They also distribute the plug plants, pots and compost to the schools and collect them again to assemble the train.

Networking within the Community

LILLINGTON IN BLOOM

For the past five years Chain Community Office has organised a front garden award scheme in Lillington, Leamington Spa. Groups of volunteers have been asked to nominate any gardens they see, as they walk around Lillington, which they think are worthy of such an award. All nominations are judged by an independent person and the residents of the final gardens selected, receive a surprise voucher, together with a letter of congratulations from the organisers.

DRAGON FIELD

Behind the picturesque Dragon Cottage on Guy’s Cliffe Avenue lies a small play area which is owned and maintained by Warwick District Council. From the cottage side it is approached over a footbridge over a little stream. On the other side a footpath under a railway embankment leads to Old Milverton Road.

In 2013 an enterprising local resident, Julie Bradley, formed a “Friends” group to keep an eye on the play area, and to report any problems to the Council. The Friends are now a group of dedicated local residents who have decided to look after the site and take an interest in its history and wildlife. They litter pick, record the wildlife, monitor any problems, and liaise with the District and County Councils to solve them and to make improvements.

Since 2013 they have run an annual Nature Quest afternoon with a range of nature related activities for families. Each year numbers attending have increased with 40 - 50 + families attending.

The aim is to stimulate an interest in the natural world and show the variety of wildlife using Dragon Fields. The Scout group from St. Mark’s Church kindly loan a gazebo for the event.

In 2014 and 2015 a Dawn Chorus walk has been held early in May and early September. A Bat walk using detectors from the wildlife trust is planned for later in the year.
Portfolio for Leamington in Bloom 2015

Periodically members note problems and contact the appropriate authorities.

Severn Trent Water was contacted to deal with graffiti at the pumping station and alerted them to possible stream pollution. Liaison with the District Council ensures that fallen trees, fence repairs, vandalism of the play areas and tipping of garden rubbish are all dealt with quickly. Benches, a recycling litter bin and more bird and bat boxes have been procured at the request of the Friends Group. The Group has recently persuaded the Council to fence the children’s play area subject to the Friends providing funding. The Group has been successful in obtaining external funding for a Nature Quest event and the purchase of a timber climbing frame for junior age children.

ROYAL LEAMINGTON SPA
HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

This Society meets once a month at St Peter’s Church Hall in Dormer Place, Leamington Spa. We have gradually increased our membership during the last year which now stands at 107. We hope to encourage citizens of Leamington Spa and the surrounding area to develop an interest in all things ‘horticultural’.

Our meetings last approximately 2 hours, and we have a different speaker each month, talking on a wide variety of gardening from specific plants to gardens of special interest, wildlife and not forgetting those with allotments. Speakers have included: Roy Lancaster, Adam Pascoe, Stephen Lacey, Nigel Colborne, Gay Search, Christine Walkden, Bob Brown and Howard Drury.

Quizzes have also been enjoyed and we organise visits during the summer months to: Garden Centres, well known gardens across the British Isles and in July we have a 4 day visit to Gardens of North Devon.

Chris Walton – Committee Member of RLSHS

ROYAL LEAMINGTON SPA FLOWER CLUB

This Club was formed in 1959 until 1962 and known as The Sweet Pea Society. It was then renamed as The Flower Lovers Guide from 1962 until 1968. It then became the Royal Leamington Spa Flower Club. The Town Mayor was President until 1990 until he/she became a Patron. From 1990 former Chairpersons became President. Membership each year is 100+ and is an Associate Member of NAFAS (National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies).

Royal Leamington Spa Flower Club is now established in the Royal Naval Club which enables us to expand our activities. As well as providing a venue for our usual monthly meetings, we are able to hold workshops and more social events.

We celebrated our Emerald Anniversary meeting with a demonstration by Jonathan Moseley of TV’s “Allotment Challenge” fame. In addition, over the last twelve months we arranged flowers for:-

1. The National Bowls Championships;
2. The World War I commemorative event in the Spa Centre;
3. Mothering Sunday when we arranged baskets to raise money for the Air Ambulance and other local charities;
4. Demonstrations we gave to local societies and residential homes; and
5. Entry to local shows and Church flower festivals.

June D Doull – Chair of RLSFC
EVENTS IN THE PARKS

The Town is blessed with a significant number of parks and open spaces which provide unrivalled opportunity for open air events, including:

- Jephson Gardens – Open air theatre; Bands in the Park
- Pump Room Gardens- Multi ethnic “MELA” festival; Food and Drink Festival; Peace Festival
- Holt Recreation Ground Lillington- Lillington Fun Day

ALLOTMENTS

Royal Leamington Spa is home to 6 thriving Allotment Associations, membership of which is fully subscribed.

These sites provide havens of tranquillity in our urban landscape and enable people from a wide social background to enjoy cultivating produce for their families and the relaxation that accompanies it. Four of the six Allotment Associations are supported with grants from Royal Leamington Spa Town Council which owns or sub-lets the land. Those that are not in public ownership have been assisted with grants from the Council’s community Grant Fund.

An example of the innovative projects now taking place at the Allotments is the Butterfly sanctuary at Binswood Allotments.

A very neglected area existed adjacent to the Borrowdale Drive entrance to the Allotments that for various reasons was unsuitable for cultivation. Over the years there had been attempts to tidy it up but the nettles and brambles kept growing! In 2014 it was proposed that the area be turned into a butterfly/wildlife conservation area. Over the past year this has been a work in progress.

The area was cleared of brambles, mown to keep the grass down. Raised beds were constructed for perennial plants attractive to butterflies. This year a small pond was constructed and the remaining area sown as a wildflower meadow with a mixture of grasses, annual and perennial wild flowers. A butterfly information panel will be erected and some natural bench seating provided.

THE DELL

This small park, tucked away in the Milverton area of Leamington Spa, has been revived in the last 16 years by Friends of the Dell and more recently by the volunteer gardeners, the GALS (Gardening Around Leamington Spa), whose unstinting efforts have turned a wilderness into wonderful floral displays.

A very neglected area existed adjacent to the Borrowdale Drive entrance to the Allotments
In 2011 the Friends secured a Big Lottery award to finance a variety of improvements, while in 2012 the GALS won the prestigious Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service. In the same year the GALS and the Friends shared a Leamington Society award for significantly enhancing the environment of the town.

**RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT**

Warwick District Council provides a variety of Refuse Collection Services to every household in the district, including:

- refuse collection 52 weeks of the year alternating recycling collections and regular grey bin refuse
- the provision of green bins for a fortnightly collection of garden waste
- the provision of red boxes for a fortnightly collection of newspapers and bottles and cans. Red bags are also available for cardboard.
- This year the range of items that can be recycled has been increased and additional bags issued to all households

Every householder has been issued with the recycling leaflet setting out what can and can’t be recycled. The result is that over 50% of household waste is now recycled. A chargeable collection service is offered for large bulky household items.

Recycling Centres can be found around the town in every precinct of shops, in car parks and public areas. A shredding system is also available whereby the Council will provide a manned machine to shred large branches. The householder is offered the shredded material for use on their own garden.

A large range of recycling bins have been installed in small precincts etc. to make recycling easier for everyone

**The promotion of Recycling**

**Action 21** a local registered Charity actively promotes and facilitates recycling and aims to reduce the environmental impact of the Leamington and Warwick communities and raise awareness of the benefits of sustainable living.

The Charity operates a recycling centre for the donation of reusable goods at its base at Milverton House, Court Street which is extremely well used.

**The Action 21 Re-useful Shop**

Action 21 offers local people a range of volunteering opportunities to enable them to contribute to these sustainable projects.

**Proving the point – fruit and vegetables growing in old and damaged baths!**

20
Green Geeks

Green Geeks is a social enterprise providing a local, friendly and trusted service by informed, trained and qualified staff for the supply of computer hardware and software. They offer a recycling service free of charge and are able to offer computers at good value and recommend (where possible) the best free software for various platforms.

Age UK at the recycling centre

This shop is now operated by the Charity Age UK (Warwickshire) and is located below the recycling centre on the same site in Princes Drive. They accept donations and divert 4 tonnes a week from landfill by various means as well as raising approximately £200,000.00 pa for the charity.

Waste Management Centre- Princes Drive

This extensive service requires the use of a site map to get you to the appropriate areas.
Portfolio for Leamington in Bloom 2015

Projects for 2015

GARWAY CLOSE – NEW COMMUNITY PLANTING SCHEME

A new initiative promoted by Peter Bailey, a member of the Leamington in Bloom Committee and resident of Park Road, has brought together local residents and Warwick District Council – the landowner in a project to improve and add interest to an area of managed woodland near the residential areas of Garway Close and Belmont Drive.

Ten local residents met up in March to discuss possible improvements with Officers and decided they would like to plant some bulbs, as well as add bird nesting boxes to the surrounding trees.

Bulbs and whips will be introduced during the autumn, but in the meantime, two residents have exposed the edging stones along Belmont Drive between the pavement and the grassed area, and there are plans to clear the larger areas of brambles etc. around the perimeter edges.

Many residents have agreed to make an initial payment of £5 towards bulbs and bird boxes, and the local Neighbourhood Watch is being approached for a possible financial contribution. Leamington Town Council is also keen to support initiatives like this through its Community Grant scheme.

The project will be developing over the next 12 months and we look forward to seeing the difference it will make in the community.

Conclusion

Each year economic and financial restraints, both in the public and the private sector, impact on our ability to develop new projects and to maintain existing ones to the high standard that local residents and visitors have come to expect.

Our campaign this year has seen greater working with community groups and additional sustainable planting. The successful introduction of sustainable planting in public areas has done much to reduce water consumption and the need for high maintenance, both in terms of cost and resources. When sustainable planting was first introduced in 2010 many local residents were concerned and numerous complaints received. The lack of summer bedding was seen as detrimental to the town.

However the impact of the sustainable planting and its unique shapes and colours have won over many of the critics. As the plants have matured, their shapes become more defined and they have reached varying heights and their colours have become more pronounced. They are eye-catching – particularly on the roundabouts throughout the town – and may yet again attract complaints - on highway safety grounds!

2015 represents a new challenge for the Committee as it is stepping up a category in the Heart of England in Bloom Competition. We are certain that whilst our enthusiasm remains undiminished that we have much to learn as we strive to achieve the highest accolades that the Town has become accustomed to in previous Competitions.

The Leamington in Bloom Committee will consider carefully how sustainable many of the current features of our annual campaign are. The backbone of all ‘In Bloom’ groups and Committees are local volunteers but as individuals work longer the number of volunteers available may reduce.
Much of the work of the Committee supports local community groups but without sufficient resources, help, advice and encouragement the assistance it can offer may be limited.

This year the Committee has launched a new weblog to act as a showcase for all the good things that are happening at a Community level. It is hoped that this will interest the public and encourage greater numbers to support Leamington in Bloom. We hope you enjoy looking at our new blog at [http://www.lemingtoninbloom.co.uk/](http://www.lemingtoninbloom.co.uk/)

**Sponsors and Supporters 2015**

Royal Leamington Spa Town Council

Warwick District Council, their staff and their Contractors-

- The Landscape Group
- Sita (waste management)
- Veolia (street cleansing)

Leamington BID Ltd

Community Groups –
- The Sydni Centre
- Gardening around Leamington Spa (GALS)
- Friends of the Dell
- Friends of Leamington Station
- Friends of Dragon Field
- Friends of Christchurch Gardens
- Friends of the Pump Room Gardens

Kingsley School
Campion School
Local Nursery and Primary schools
ARC CIC – Foundry Wood
Incredible Edible - SPARKS

**Acknowledgements**

The Chain – Lillington
RLS Horticultural Society
RLS Flower Club
APPENDIX