

Chairman's Message

Christmas is nearly upon us but hopefully we shall be able to get out into the park to enjoy its winter delights. Our gardeners have a rest over the two winter months but will be back in force in February to continue their amazing work. Well done to them all.

Welcome to our newest members, at least two of whom responded as a result of our articles in the BDRA Resident newsletter. We appreciate being included in their editions and hope that we reach more members of the community through this.

A very Happy Christmas to you all and a healthy and hopeful New Year!

* * * * *

Carols in the Park



We hope that you will join us for Carols by the Christmas tree on **Saturday December 15th at 4pm**. Free mulled wine and mince pies, etc. Do bring a torch with you!

* * * * *

Photography Competition

The photo competition closed at the end of October and as we go to print, the judges are finalising their selection. The winners will be announced on Saturday January 5th at 2pm at the prize-giving exhibition of the finalists at Billericay library. The display of photographs will be on all that month. Do take a look when you are in the library.

Bats

After three years of popular bat evenings, FOLM coordinated the installation of eight bat boxes in the Spring.

Whilst it can take several years for bats to start using boxes, they will be checked regularly for evidence of occupation. A first attempt in September had to be abandoned due to heavy rain and low temperature but a second attempt by Essex Bat Group members, on a Sunday in early October, produced results far better than expected.



Out of the eight boxes installed, four had been used. In one they found eight soprano pipistrelle bats, with another in box 6. Two boxes also showed signs of bat activity, with lots of bat droppings. The bats were all weighed and measured, and the sex noted (6 females and 3 males). For boxes that had only been up for six months this was an amazing result, establishing Lake Meadows as a significant site for bats in Essex. We really are quite batty!

* * * * *

Polyanthuses and Bulbs

The polyanthuses were planted by our gardeners, early in October, in the raised bed and the flower boxes. They seem to have settled in well, with signs of new leaves and flower buds already, so we should be in for a great show next Spring, along with the tulips we also added to the boxes.

We also planted 500 daffodils in the rhododendron area and 400 small bulbs in the Garden of the Child. These were funded by a kind donation from a Methodist church event organised by two of our members.

What to look for in Winter in the Park

Winter is a great time of year to get close up views of birds visiting the park for food, water and shelter, as well as providing an opportunity to see some species which are only here during the winter months.

Occasionally, if you are lucky, you may see a tiny goldcrest. Britain's smallest breeding bird; it can often be seen amongst the conifers. Berry-loving birds such as waxwings, which love rowan and cotoneaster berries may visit us from the east; whilst families of long-tailed tits flit about seeking seeds and insects in the remains of the flower meadow.

The robin, of course, is the favourite of many and heralds the Christmas season. Britain's newly appointed National Bird rarely lives for longer than 2 years but is always bold even in the coldest days.

Keep your eyes open for blossom on the two new prunus autumnalis trees in the gardens – one by the raised bed, the other nearer the pavilion. Planted in memory of loved ones, these will bring joy during grey winter days.

* * * * *

Cherry Trees



Regular visitors to the park will be pleased to see that the broken cherry trees, originally donated by Bennetts Funeral Directors have been replaced by Basildon Parks' team. They look strong healthy specimens, so let's hope they survive the vandals this time! Please report any vandalism you see taking place, to us, Basildon Council and the Police.

* * * * *

Now it's your turn to help us ...

We fully understand that many members are unable to help with things like gardening, working parties or manning the hut, but you can still help us – yes, even from your arm chair! Please encourage your families, friends and neighbours to join the Friends. Every single new member is important to us, every £5 helps us improve the park and funders are impressed by the community support that we have. Membership forms are on the website or ring Rosie.

Our Tree Heritage

Billericay is blessed with many fine trees that add a sense of well-being to residents, as well as being good for wildlife. However, with the onset of the "Local Plan" and the thousands of New Build houses destined to be built in and around our town, many of our trees are under threat. Thankfully at Lake Meadows, its many trees area protected, and the guided tree walks led by FoLM, along with the tree identification leaflets, help "raise awareness" of the amenity, aesthetic and wildlife value of the trees.

Billericay Town Council has encouraged the formation of a Tree Warden Group to highlight the many advantages that trees in the built environment give to us and to protect those trees that become vulnerable. Not all mature and characterful trees in and around our town have a Tree Protection Order (TPO) on them, so they are vulnerable to being felled or damaged for a variety of reasons. We can all help by being aware of the need to value trees, by checking on TPOs, applying for a TPO to be put on any tree (You don't need the property owner's permission to apply for one) contacting Billericay Town Council or Basildon's Tree officers or by contacting our local tree wardens, who are all volunteers, on billericaytreewardens@gmail.com Newcomers are always welcome to join the group, All you need is to have an abiding interest of trees and concern for their welfare.

* * * * *

Pledge of £60m to plant trees

Millions of trees will be planted as part of a government funding pledge to give £10 million funding to councils to plant trees in city streets, to improve green spaces and to help preserve the environment and offset carbon pollution.

A Treasury spokesman said, "Urban trees can ... improve amenity and property values, slow surface run-off and can help absorb air pollutants."

£50 million investment in woodland is estimated to provide 10 million trees over the next 30 years.

* * * * *

Working Parties

We shall be holding working parties at 9.30am on Saturdays February 16th and March 16th depending upon the weather. Please keep an eye on the website for any changes. If you can spare a couple of hours on any of those dates, it would greatly help in getting one or two special jobs done. Recently we have moved wood chips to different beds to act as mulch, so saving time and effort in weeding, as well as repairing the sensory beds and collecting up leaves. Future jobs will include repairing a woodland path, helping with tidying hedges and path edges, installing new equipment and new projects.

New Newsletter Feature

For the next few editions, we plan to include short articles from different volunteers in our team about what they do. So, in this edition we are starting off with 'The Trustee'.

"I was involved with the Friends when the group first came together in 2012. We were excited by the prospect of establishing ourselves as an independent group and really making a difference to the park. Following a meeting at the Town Council office, about eight of us met in a local hostelry to discuss the way forward. We battled with things like a constitution, registering as a charity and running our meetings but we soon learned and now everything runs just like clockwork!

Our team of twelve trustees (as committee members are known) is a great crowd and I feel privileged to be a member. I have made some great friends! We each have our own skills, which helps share the work load and we all get along really well.

So, as a trustee, what do I actually do? Most importantly of all, I help ensure that we fulfil the requirements of being a registered charity, ensuring the accounts are kept in good order and the aims of the charity, 'to help care for the park for the benefit of the community', are met. We meet every month to discuss anything from a new policy or health and safety issues, to hear reports on our current projects and activities, as well as making plans for new projects and our annual events. Most of all I enjoy meeting people, especially our members, including our hut helpers and our gardeners, as well as welcoming new people too, of course.

Being a trustee does take up quite a bit of my time, but I am really proud of what we have achieved in the six years in improving our beautiful park!" Rosie

The Park Survey

In the summer we conducted a survey of park users. Over 240 people responded, of which about a third were FoLM members. It will take time for the final report of the findings to be completed - there were over 750 written comments alone. We plan that it will be completed in the New Year, but some very positive results included:

- 99.1% felt safe in the park
- 97% felt that maintenance was good or above
- 95% rated the cleanliness of the park highly
- 98.7% felt FoLM events were good, half of those rating them as excellent.

Overall the Trustees felt it was an excellent outcome and plan to put the report on our website, as well as sharing the findings with Council Managers.

Children's Corner

Hooray, hooray, the dragon has been repaired and has had a new coat of paint, as has the wizard. Had you noticed something though ... the dragon's egg near the log creature has hatched! So somewhere a new baby dragon is flying the skies. Let us know if you spot it, but meanwhile remember that a dragon's favourite food is popcorn!



Did you know ...

- The most stressful thing about being a dragon must be trying to blow out the candles on your birthday cake.
- Why it is easy to work out the weight of a dragon? They come with scales.
- Why dragons are such good story tellers? They have very impressive tails.

Christmas Word search

Y	L	L	O	H	A	Y	C	R	O	C	K
S	A	M	T	S	I	R	H	C	X	H	L
A	S	A	M	T	S	I	R	H	C	R	O
M	E	R	R	Y	F	I	R	R	H	I	V
T	C	Y	S	K	S	C	S	I	R	S	E
S	H	A	A	T	A	H	A	S	I	T	O
I	R	H	M	R	M	R	M	T	S	M	T
R	I	A	T	R	T	I	T	M	T	A	E
H	S	X	S	Y	S	S	S	A	M	S	L
C	T	D	I	H	I	T	I	S	A	U	T
S	M	L	R	M	R	M	R	T	S	S	S
S	A	O	H	A	H	A	H	A	Z	E	I
A	S	G	C	E	C	S	C	R	A	J	M
E	C	N	E	S	N	I	K	N	A	R	F

Ass	Hay	Merry
Fir	Holly	Mistletoe
Frankincense	Jesus	Myrrh
Gold	Love	Ox

And ... How many times can find 'Christmas' in the word search?

And finally ...

According to the Parks Alliance: An estimated 2.6bn visits are made to parks across the UK each year, which equates to 7,123,287 visits per day. Let's hope they don't all descend on Lake Meadows together! Interestingly, only 54% of children in the eastern region visit parks each month, but that is far more than anywhere else in the country!

