

A Happy New Year to all our readers! Now that the cold weather has relented, we hope you will be able to get out and enjoy the Loop, whether walking, cycling or jogging. There is still some colour showing along the banks, with oak leaves still in place, orange willow saplings, etc. to brighten the winter landscape.

### **Manchester Be Proud Award**

The big news this month is that we won the environmental group award at the finals ceremony on 10 December. Dick Venes writes: ‘The Manchester City Council “Be Proud” awards are an annual recognition of the contribution of volunteers to good citizenship which makes a difference to their neighbourhoods. The Friends were nominated by Vincent Walsh for the award in the “Contribution to the Environment – Group” category of the awards, and we were delighted to make it to the final shortlist of three. The winner was announced at a glittering awards ceremony at the Town Hall, attended by four longstanding members – Janet Cuff, Cos Harnasz, Frances McCann and Dick Venes – with Colin Bennett joining Vincent as proposer. It was fitting that founder member Cos stepped up to receive the trophy and cheque for £300 from the BBC’s Gordon Burns. Some of you may have seen our group photograph on the night in the South Manchester Reporter.

The award is a great recognition of the improvements and activities we have lobbied for and organised ourselves over the nearly ten years of the Friends’ existence. One of the items on the agenda of the members’ meeting next Monday will be to decide an appropriate way to spend the £300 that came with the award, thanks to sponsors Enterprise Manchester. The splendid glass trophy will also be on show. The award also gives us more of a reason to celebrate our tenth anniversary in July – hopefully this will take the form of a barbecue or similar event on the Loop itself.’

### **December Non-Clean-Up**

We had arranged a big clean-up for Saturday 4 December to coincide with a sponsored walk from Debdale to Levenshulme on behalf of a young girl cancer sufferer and the children’s hospital treating her. Our plans to clean up the walking route in advance were frustrated by deep snow, but the walk went ahead with hundreds of participants converging on Levenshulme Green in the middle of the day. There they were greeted by an array of food and gift stalls, a Santa’s grotto, music and media photographers. We shared a stall with Sustrans, and handed out Loop maps and guides to the walkers as they arrived. The enormous success of the event, organised by the girl’s family, prompted the thought that we could well publicise the Loop for other sponsored events, as they provide a great introduction to the Loop for people who would not otherwise know about it.

## **New Year Ride**

In the past this has been a rather small and low-key event, due to a combination of the weather and people recovering from the New Year celebrations. This year we were delighted to have more than 25 participants for the ride along the length of the Loop from Chorlton to Debdale and back on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Vale Cottage Inn was stretched to provide food for such a number, so we had to split the group between two locations. Thanks to all for a most enjoyable outing after all the snowy weather.

## **Help Available to Improve the Loop**

Besides the work of the Friends, there are other groups involved in improving the environment of the Loop. On 12 November a supervised party of up to 60 students from Manchester University's Volunteering and Community Engagement Team worked on the entrance and section westwards from Sherwood Street. They cleared some undergrowth and planted bulbs to cheer up the entrance, now that the poplar trees have been felled. We are hoping that their involvement will become a regular one. There is also the possibility of a regular input from Community Payback this year, of up to two days per week. Keeping the Loop looking clean and attractive is a top priority for encouraging people to use it. And we should not forget the routine work of Tom, the Sustrans warden, and our own Rangers, who had a useful meeting with Mike Dagley from the Sustrans Manchester office on 6 December.

## **Lattice Bridge**

Plans are afoot to apply with Sustrans for a major grant from the Lottery Heritage Fund to complete the renovation of the lattice bridge at Highfield, and landscape the whole area around it as well as making a proper water feature of the collected rain water in the pond beneath. Watch this space!

## **Future Events**

**Monday 17 January:** Members' Meeting, 7.30 pm, Union Chapel, Fallowfield. As mentioned in the November Newsletter, we shall be welcoming Dave Bishop to give an illustrated talk about his surveys of plants along the Loop. Dave is an unrivalled expert on plants in Greater Manchester, and has already contributed much to our biodiversity planning. His talk will provide a useful scene setting for our own discussion about future environmental priorities. All members are welcome.

**Sunday 13 February:** We shall be leading a Chorlton Wanderers' ride including the Loop and Mersey Valley, starting at 10 for 10.15 am from Chorlton Water Park. Total length will be about 25 miles. Details from Dick on 224 3843.

**Sunday 13 March:** Our annual work day in collaboration with the Sale and Altrincham Conservation Volunteers. The precise time and place for this have still to be decided, and will be circulated via the web and email nearer the date. Please note it now for your diaries.