

Recent Activities

July AGM At the AGM all the officers were reappointed for another year, with thanks for their previous year's work, and Ian Tate was welcomed as a new member of the Committee. We celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Friends in appropriate style, and continued afterwards at the Grand Central pub in Fallowfield (just across the road from the closed Fallowfield Station pub where our inaugural meeting had been held).

Plant walk Thanks once again to Dave Bishop for his very informative guided walk identifying plant species on the Loop section east of Sainsbury's. For those who missed it, and would like to see his comprehensive list of plants recorded on the Loop, Dave can be contacted and is happy to share this.

Promotion and rides We ran a stall at the Velodrome on 7 August for the SkyRides event, and another for the day celebrating the life of Reg Harris on 27 August, which was attended by enthusiasts from all over the country. Unfortunately the weather was too bad – really bad – for our proposed ride from the Velodrome to the old cycle track in Fallowfield via the Loop, which had to be abandoned. Thankfully the weather had been much kinder the previous Sunday for our ride on the Trans-Pennine Trail to Heatley, and we all enjoyed the sunshine in the garden of the Green Dragon at lunchtime, before returning by the Bridgewater Canal towpath.

Community orchard At our May members' meeting it had been agreed that the £300 grant we received as part of our Manchester Pride environmental award should go towards the creation of a community orchard, with an equivalent sum contributed from our own reserves. The idea would be to plant a wide variety of native fruit trees which would blossom throughout the spring and fruit throughout late summer and autumn, and involve local schools and community groups as well as ourselves in their planting and upkeep. A first site for an orchard has now been identified on the open land adjacent to Crayfield road in Levenshulme, to the left as you enter from the road. With the help of one of our committee members, Colin Bennett, who has contacts with other community orchards in Manchester, we have submitted an application for a grant to the national Big Tree Fund to double our money, with a further sum contributed by Sustrans as third partner in the project. Colin has drawn up a plan for the site and a provisional programme of activities, starting this autumn. More details will be available at the members' meeting next Monday (see below). Offers for help (site clearing, planting etc.) as the project gets under way will be most gratefully received. A second site for an orchard has been identified near the Sherwood Street entrance in Fallowfield.

Guest contributors

Your Newsletter editor is always delighted to receive contributions from others to the edition. Cos Harnasz, one of our founding members and a previous Secretary of the Friends, offers some 'Floop Chat', including more on that hardy perennial, Japanese knotweed, which is rife throughout the Loop, and other matters. Our Honorary President and historian of the Loop railway line, Eddie Johnson, follows this up with a brief history of Levenshulme station, currently vacant.

Floop Chat, by Cos Harnasz

Wildlife Corner. Japanese knotweed, just mention the name and discussion spreads like the plant itself! Partly because the law comes associated with it. Two laws in fact: one to do with planting or causing it to grow in the wild, the other with disposing it. It spreads in the first instance by growing woody stocks that just get bigger and fatter, and sending out sideways creeping rhizomes, from which the new shoots arise. Rhizomes are that clumpy mass of roots you find just below the stems of some plants. However, just nip a bit of knotweed rhizome, and the plant will regenerate from that. In fact, knotweed is able to regenerate from bits of the stem and even the crown. Fragments from a shredder will regrow and form new plants. (It sounds like something from Dr Who). Bits carried downstream can float long distances and colonise new areas. Over 60 sites infested by the knotweed have been identified on the Floop, and we have agreed with Peter Green of Sustrans to help with a chemical eradication programme under his supervision.

I heard at a recent FotFL meeting that the knotweed plants in this country are nearly all female. I didn't know this. So knotweed propagation is all done vegetatively. Males are not required! There are a couple of other plants you'll see along the Floop which similarly have separate sexes. Willow, for example, and holly. They are called dioecious. More common are monoecious plants, which have separate male and female flowers on the same plant, such as oak and alder. But most plants have bisexual flowers with functional male and female parts. I hadn't realised what interesting sex lives were being led as I meandered along the Floop!

Stumped? As part of the maintenance of the Floop, also allowing wildflowers to grow, trees are sometimes trimmed, cut back or felled. Someone's had the idea of leaving some stumps for carving – as has been done in Chorlton Park. What do you think? Has anybody got any other examples, or know of any wood sculptors? What about turning the chippings into biofuel? Again, anybody got any ideas?

All stations go? Repo TV has ceased business at the old Levenshulme station. Wouldn't it be great if the fine building were an environmental/community hub? The Sustrans north of England HQ! Have a look at it in the forthcoming Levenshulme festival (21 October to 6 November), and read about its history in Eddie Johnson's piece that follows. Meanwhile the old Fallowfield station still lies fallow following the closing down of the pub on the site. It is one of the few remaining examples of suburban railway station architecture in the area, and our campaign to stop Sainsbury's from destroying the building was only part successful. I am worried they will complete the job.....

Comments on the above points most welcome: Telephone 0161 283 7548

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Next Members' Meeting: Monday 19 September, 7.30 pm at Union Chapel, Wellington Road, Fallowfield

All members are welcome to help us plan our autumn activities, which will include community orchard preparations, Japanese knotweed eradication, social rides and much else. Your help is always welcome.

If you cannot make the meeting, please put Sunday 23 October in your diaries. We will be running an information stall at the Levenshulme Festival (Crayfield Road entrance to the Loop) from 10 am to 1 pm, providing 'Dr Bike' bicycle repair/maintenance advice, leading a family bike ride to Debdale and back, viewing the proposed community orchard site, and more. Offers for help are welcome. Or just come and pay us a call.