



Newsletter September 2014

Parks by the Loop: Alexandra Park

One of the distinctive features of the Loop is that it not only acts as a green corridor in itself, but also links a number of parks along its length, or within easy reach of it. This is the first in a Newsletter series profiling these different parks, and we start with Alexandra Park because it has just recently reopened after a £5.5 million facelift, partly paid for by council tax payers. The park was originally created in 1868 'to deter the working men of Manchester from the alehouse during their day off.' It was innovative in its use of oval-shaped and curved pathways, and in the incorporation of sporting activity into an ornamental park. More recently it has hosted the annual Caribbean music festival. The regeneration project has involved the renovation of the lodge and pavilion: the former containing an exhibition of the park's history, the latter housing a new community café and facilities for sports teams using the new lacrosse pitch, cricket square and floodlit tennis courts. There is also a new children's playground. The renovation has been funded from a £2.2 million Heritage Lottery grant matched by the City Council, with added funding from the English Cricket Board, the Lawn Tennis Association and Sport England.

The park will make for a good family outing, and can be reached from the Loop at the Athol Road exit (originally the site of Alexandra Road station). Go up Athol Road by Whalley Range school to Wilbraham Road, taking care crossing to the other side and continuing right and then first left down Spring Bridge Road to the Park entrance. Have fun! The next Newsletter will feature Debdale Park.

Loopy Bees – Honey in the City

In our May Newsletter we reported on the honey bees kept by John and Wendy Eaden on their allotment adjacent to the Loop near our Fallowfield orchard, and we welcomed Wendy at our May members' meeting to talk about the rich diversity of bee forage plants along the Loop. They now report on this year's results:

'A sustained period of warm dry weather in June and early July led to prolific flowering of brambles along the embankments as well as record-breaking flowering of the many lime trees in nearby parks and roadsides. We can now see the results in a bumper crop of honey from our four hives, yielding over 120 kg of clear golden liquid with a delicate and complex flavour. We extract, filter and bottle the honey, which is quite unlike the sort of blended honey you will find in a supermarket. It comes in 1lb jars at £5 and we also have a limited number of 12oz jars at £4. To obtain your jar of locally sourced honey contact us by one of the following means: tel. 0161 291 8059, mobile 07808 066951, email john.eaden@ntlworld.com.

Amazing bee statistics: A single honey bee is estimated to bring in 1/12 teaspoon of nectar in her lifetime. It takes nectar from two million flowers to produce 1lb of honey. How many bees does it take to produce 120kg of honey and how many flowers?’

We hope to provide a tasting at our next members’ meeting (see below), also a tasting of blackberry and apple from the Loop bramble fruit.

Further enhancing plant diversity

Botanical surveys of the Loop have shown that some sections are very rich and interesting botanically, while other areas are sparsely populated by plants, partly due to necessary groundwork such as near the siphon in Levenshulme, and unusual events such as the recent landslip near Nelstrop Road. In these areas there is the opportunity to create a slightly different mix of flora. River of Flowers (www.riverofflowers.org) have approached us about wildflower planting on these and other sites. They have also donated two crab apple trees for planting at the Debdale orchard (currently on display with four others outside the City Art Gallery).

The community orchards

Whilst the fruit trees in our three orchards are doing OK and have not been damaged, we have noticed that the fruit is disappearing before it is ripe, not only because of the strong winds in August. This is a recurring problem and difficult to resolve apart from hoping that poorly tummies will provide a learning experience for the pickers. Of course the fruit is there for anyone to collect, but not before time. We are also conscious that our upkeep of the sites is somewhat sporadic, and anyone who could help with a more regular maintenance in spring and summer please contact Dick or David (dbeetham@mighty-micro.co.uk). For those who wish to learn about fruit tree pruning, David will lead sessions at the Levenshulme and Fallowfield orchards in November (details in next Newsletter).

Progress at the Levenshulme quadrants

Local mum and FotFL member Lara Moore has planned a children’s play area on the north-west quadrant where the trees have been felled. Features she would like to see included are smart fencing, a seated story telling area, play animals made from the wood on site and landscaped grass and wildflower areas. Lara is taking time out from organising funding for the project due to a new addition to her family, so we have taken over the rather onerous task of completing the Big Lottery grant application. Advice from any members who have had experience of this process would be welcome! Meanwhile, Incredible Edible Levenshulme are due to install some raised beds for herbs and fruit bushes on the north-east quadrant during September.

Next members’ meeting

Our next members’ meeting will be next Monday 15 September (**not** 22nd as earlier suggested) at the Union Chapel, Wellington Road, Fallowfield. We will welcome Abigail Pound, the new Sustrans NW Volunteer Project Officer, who is keen to meet members. Besides the usual agenda, there will be honey and fruit tastings from the Loop.