

Friends of Blaise Summer Newsletter



Broad-bodied chaser dragonfly photographed in our Community Garden

Welcome everyone to our Summer special!

As I write this we are having a short respite before the next heatwave so hope you're enjoying it and glad that your garden is getting a well deserved watering which doesn't involve hosepipes.

The last 3 months have had their ups and downs and as usual I will try and bring you the highlights (and lowlights) of Blaise goings-on, not just on our activities, but on the Estate as a whole.

Of course, as most of you will know, recent weeks have been dominated by the Travellers invasion of the Parkland. The broad facts are that they broke through a gate and fence on the western side of the Estate Friday night having been chased off earlier by the police. By the Saturday of the next week they were gone in the knowledge they would have been forceably removed the following day charged with anti-social behaviour.

It could have been worse - their stay on the Downs lasted a lot longer - but they left behind a lot of bad feeling, and large amounts of waste and old building material. The costs incurred in terms of compensation, clear up, repair and lost parking charges have been significant for the Council and the taxpayer. Together with a number of local Councillors, we are seeking to understand how it could have been allowed to happen and what the security measures will be brought in to make it less likely in future.

Together with the break-in to the Castle (referred to in my previous newsletter), it goes to show how vulnerable to vandalism in all its forms we are in Blaise.

Talking of which.....



*Potential candidate to replace the
vandalised stone dog?*

On a happier note, our activities have been carrying on as normal, sometimes supplemented by local corporate teams looking for a bit of constructive outdoor exercise away from their desks.

A recent group came from Pieminster who enjoyed it so much that they will be back, next time with a supply of their delicious pies! We have also hosted an enthusiastic band from Defra.



Castle Opening

During the school holidays we are opening the Castle on Wednesdays in addition to bank holidays and the first Sunday of the month, but combining that with selective clearance of the woodland edge.

Thanks to Alan Roberts for his sterling work on repairing the bolts for the roof door, damaged in the earlier break-in. The Castle entrance has also been secured by our own, better “discus” padlocks.

June and July saw Wind Band concerts on the Parkland, successful for (in donations), for the players who always enjoy the chance to play in such a wonderful setting, and of course for the many park users who came to listen and picnic on the grass.

We have now commissioned an historically accurate Coat of Arms as an engraving to be fixed to the Castle entrance. More on that next time!

Tarn Lake

Thanks also go to our resident “Pond Czar”, Simon Richards, who, with others, has been lovingly restoring the banks of the pond, shoring these up with stones, slices of tree trunk, silt and compost. He is now planting this out to create a soft border which is not just more pleasant to look at but also more nature-friendly.

Given the number of children and dogs that visit the lake, this is no mean feat and we will need to keep on top of this project.



Pond bank transformed from this...

.....to this



...



.....and this

Gym Equipment

There has also been a major step forward in our plans to create an older teenage and adult outdoor gym close to the path between the cafe and the Museum . Our Treasurer, Hugh Snodgrass, has been pushing for this over many years. We are contributing at least £10,000 towards it, with various Council and sports grants supplying the rest. The project has now had the funding and specifications approved and bids from potential suppliers are out to tender. The aim is to have this installed by October .

Moving on to future plans we have for Blaise:

We are compiling a list of potential future jobs that need doing. We will then, in agreement with the Rangers, incorporate that into their own programme of work. That will give our activities more of a structure allowing us to prioritise projects. As always, we are very keen to hear your own priorities that will influence what we do. It will also show that it is not just our little band who turn up every week who are looking for improvements!

The Rangers are, for a number of reasons, failing to keep up with the replacement of damaged and decayed benches and this is despite us providing £100s to have this carried out and our offers to help to install these.

To take one example on the important site by the Beech Cathedral which had lost its seat plank and its supports were rotting: I arranged for the Fix-it Team (who deal with jobs too challenging for the Rangers) to come along to install (with our help) a replacement seat the other day. Their managers were way on holiday at the time, so we both felt we could get away with it in this case. Even though I feel confident we could install benches ourselves, the Parks managers may well not let us do it.



But it is frustrating, also in a wide sense if Council restrictive practices make it harder for us to look after the Estate.

New seat at the “Beech Cathedral”

Now that the bird-nesting season is coming to a close, we will increasingly seek to cut back encroaching vegetation. This will, among other advantages, encourage greater biodiversity, increase light levels and improve sight lines. A key area we have our eye on is that from the Coombe Dingle Car Park to the Lily Pond.

Other Blaise News

All Blaise assets - defined as anything with a roof* - have now been handed over to the Council's Corporate Services and are no longer the responsibility of the Parks Dept. One immediate result of this is at the Cafe, no longer run by Council staff but is taken over by a large commercial chain which also runs franchises for Costa and Subway. No doubt the company rewarded the Council well for choosing them, though at the expense of their customers who now have to pay 30% more on what they offer. Big Food strikes again!

Broken Nail Bridge

The wooden bridge over Hazel Brook (between Tarn Lake and the Mill) immortalised in the poem inscribed on the “water wall” behind the Cafe, has now deteriorated to the point where it is no longer safe to use.

The Fix-it Team have cordoned it off and are now considering how to repair it.

Sluice gate fitted

Someone has repeatedly been ripping out and throwing away sluice gates that we have installed at the the mouth of Tarn Lake. These have now been replaced by a much more secure one. Why is this important? Quite simply, to prevent large amounts of silt entering the pond, particularly when the river is in full flow. It still allows a steady trickle to maintain water levels and it could be lifted to let more in if needed.

Cafe Toilets

Better plumbing is being installed in the cafe toilets, with wider calibre pipes. This is supposed to stop the regular blocked drainss and consequent flooding of the facilities which had been occurring on a regular basis.

One final ask of you, particularly if you are a regular walker in Blaise:

Please look out for anything you see or hear relevant to the Estate which others might be interested in; this may be a stand-out plant, river pollution or anti-social behaviour. If you do this, I can pass the information on to the appropriate person/group who may be able to use it or do something about it. And of course that might be us!

You are our eyes and ears!

**so presumably we can't see the Orangerie stayingg on that list for very much longer the way things are going.....*

*Best regards and until next time,
Alastair, Chairman*