

Boultham Park Lake Restoration Project – summary of progress in 2020

2020 started positively for the project with a site walkabout by the Project Team on 2nd January.

A review of the designs and specifications which had been agreed in principle by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) commenced, so as to develop them to the necessary stage ready for procuring the main contractor.

On 4th February we held a drop in session in the Café which was well attended, where we discussed the tree works. The works themselves started on 17th February.

On 10th February Councillor Bushell celebrated the start of the project with a tree planting, which was very well attended, especially given the stormy weather we'd experienced running up to the day.

The Council's Executive Committee formally committed to the NLHF's Terms and Conditions on 24th February. This was an essential part of the 'Permission to Start' process, where we were required to gather various documents and evidence before the NLHF could formally give their permission for the project to go ahead. We received Permission to Start on 6th March.

A fish survey was carried out on 27th February.

We had advertised for the two project-funded posts: Community Engagement Officer and Project Assistant, with a closing date of 11th March. We received many applications, for both roles, and were in the midst of the lengthy shortlisting process when Covid-19 hit.

After a flurry of activity, and with everything up to that point running to programme, the effects of the Covid-19 restrictions were unavoidable: we were forced to put a hold on the recruitment process. Work in the background continued however, as the team were determined to continue with the main works design and tender package development.

Staff recruitment

In June we made contact with all applicants to see if they were still interested in the post (most were) and restarted the recruitment process. We had some great candidates and the Covid-19 compliant tests and interviews (the first face to face interviews in City Hall since Covid restrictions) resulted in Lindsay Johnson starting as Community Engagement Officer in August, and Kevin McCarthy starting as Project Assistant in September.

Capital works – contractor procurement

Also in June we went out to tender for the main works contractor. By the tender deadline in late July we had five bids, which were scrutinised and evaluated for quality and price by various Project Team members. The top three were interviewed and the evaluation model updated, with the outcome that the contract was awarded to Ebsford Environmental. Ebsford scored highest for quality as well as being very competitively priced.

Since then we have held the 'start-up' meeting with Ebsford, as well as various subsequent meetings. The legal contract documentation is being processed, health and safety checks have been carried out, and various design details have been discussed and resolved.

This included decisions about the piling solution for the lake edge, for which Ebsford proposed a more cost-effective alternative which would be less disruptive to install. This is based on the use of plastic pipes linked together rather than metal sheet piling. This is a relatively new but tried and tested solution which our designers and engineers are comfortable will deliver the necessary outcome whilst saving disruption and money.

It should be noted that during tender evaluations it became clear that it might not be possible to afford all of the elements of the project. The above 'value engineering' solution means that more work packages are now affordable, and at this stage the only questionable elements are works that could be delivered later on separately from this contract if necessary, for example the installation of benches.

A quick word on permissions: Planning Permission was granted in October 2019, and we received Upper Witham Internal Drainage Board consent for the tree works in February / March, and separately for the forthcoming capital works. A Felling Licence was issued by the Forestry Commission for the tree removals. No other consents are required.

There are some works which we have asked Anglian Water to deliver – this relates to the Rookery Lane end of the lake, where three surface water pipes feed in to the lake. The works are not essential for our project to succeed, but they will need doing at some point and we feel it would be better now before we have improved the lake edges. We are currently awaiting a timeline from Anglian Water.

Project Team / Project Board

Throughout the year the Project Team and Project Board have continued to meet, albeit many of the meetings have been 'virtual' rather than the face to face meetings we had planned. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust is our partner on the project, and an officer of LWT also sits on the Board.

The wider Project Team includes the client (City Council officers), a project manager, landscape designer, quantity surveyor, structural and hydrology engineers, evaluation and interpretation specialists and once we're on site will also include a Clerk of Works. Lindsay Johnson, as well as being the Community Engagement Officer, has continued to volunteer for Boutham Park and has been the Project Team lead on interpretation in her volunteer role. Lindsay has given many hours designing the public art installations and lecterns which will sit alongside. At the relevant times other people have been pulled in to support the team, for example finance, legal, procurement and communications specialists within the council.

Activities

Lindsay started by reviewing the project's Activity Plan. A draft plan was submitted to the NLHF in July 2019, and this needed reviewing, not least as Covid-19 had altered both the start date of the activities programme and also the activities that could be delivered. Some activities have had to be put later in the programme or the method of delivery changed.

The pandemic has also underlined what we already knew – the importance of good quality public green space for our health and wellbeing. Lindsay's review has incorporated a greater focus on wellbeing, as well as the existing themes of Biodiversity, Community, and Enjoying the Lake in New and Heritage Ways.

Activities so far have primarily been online (the park's website has been updated, and we've had a lot of activity on Facebook for example quizzes, 'how to' pumpkin carving and suggestions for self-

led things to do in the park). Kevin is managing the social media side of things. More recently we have held a photography competition which will result in a 2021 Boutham Park Lake calendar. We received lots of entries and the judges decided on the 24 photographs which appear in the calendar (available to buy for £5.50 – it's a beautiful calendar celebrating the park and its wildlife).

We have also started offering 'Social Prescribing'. This means that local organisations such as health agencies can 'prescribe' the project as a way of helping people to improve their wellbeing by getting involved / being outdoors / learning about their environment for example. It is very tailored to the individual, and although it's only just launched we already have a number of people who have been referred to the project.

Thank you to those BPAG members and other organisations who have commented on the planned activities, suggested activities and offered to be involved or deliver activities.

LWT have also been involved in the activity plan development. Their support on the project has been valuable strategically, practically and financially (as their staff time amounts to an 'in kind contribution' in the funding plan).

Volunteering

Volunteering is a significant part of the project, with multiple benefits: first of all is the benefit to the individual volunteer, then there is the benefit to the park and the lake, the benefit to wildlife and other park users, then there is the financial benefit to the project (as volunteer hours are counted in financial terms on paper, and so every volunteer hour worked adds to the value of the project and thus helps to being in external funding).

Unfortunately volunteering has been hit by Covid, but we are in the process of rebuilding our volunteer programme – in fact it's already started, supported by Al Brookes, the Council's Volunteer Coordinator.

The project's Activity Plan incorporates new and existing volunteer works. Some of the volunteering will be in support of the capital works, some will be alongside, and some will be ongoing maintenance for the duration of the project and beyond, as well as work on activities and events in the park.

Once Covid restrictions are relaxed there will be a push on volunteer recruitment, in particular an attempt to attract new volunteers from backgrounds where we don't have much representation, as well as supporting and retaining our long-term stalwart volunteers.

Recording

It is vital that, as well as delivering the outcomes that we've committed to, we evidence how we've done it and what we have achieved. This is essential for our own project evaluation but also for key funders.

Kevin has been developing recording systems for financial information, volunteer hours and activity outcomes. These will be used throughout the project so we can continually evaluate the success of what we're doing and keep a close eye on spend.

We are also collating data relating to water quality, habitat, biodiversity, current visitor numbers, visitor satisfaction and many other indicators which will help us to measure the success of the project in real time and at the end, when we will pull all of the information together in to an Evaluation Report. These evaluation measures have to be set out at the start, along with the

baseline data, so that we have something to measure against, and appropriate measuring methods in place.

What's next?

Ebsford aim to start on site in early January, and all being well to complete the bulk of the capital works by the end of March. Of course this will be dependent on weather and could be affected by Covid restrictions, which are impossible to predict.

Once on site we will put out regular updates in the park and on online, and directly to BPAG.

The Activity Plan will continue to progress, albeit with Covid-19 workarounds, and we are hopeful that activities will be able to return to some sort of 'normal' at some point in 2021.



This update is through necessity only a brief summary of everything that has happened in 2020; there have been many other tasks completed and hurdles crossed.

Given the circumstances of 2020, we are very happy to be very close to our original timetable, and grateful for the flexibility and determination of everyone involved, which has helped keep progress on course.

Thank you to Robert for his support as BPAG Chair and a Board Member, to all BPAG members for their ongoing support for the project, and to all of our park community for your support for the park, the lake restoration project and its aims. As always, our thanks also to National Lottery players and the National Lottery Heritage Fund for their support of the project.