



Biodiversity Group update

Thursday 20 July 2023

Overview

The Biodiversity Group was set up to provide an informal forum for people interested in the range of biodiversity activities planned for the next couple of years, who may not necessarily want to get involved in the Festival. The Group held its first meeting on 31 May to discuss current plans and engage potential volunteers.

The Biodiversity WhatsApp group currently has 32 members with several individuals indicating a significant level of commitment.

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Community wildlife garden

After a bumpy ride, we're delighted that H&H Garden's initial design treatments for the community garden have been agreed in principle by Lewisham and we have the go-ahead to progress to a second design round which will develop these into an actionable plan.

Design

Components are likely to include:

- Wildlife-friendly planting with long flowering and all year round interest
- A style using 'drifts of plants' which will break out of the semicircle and extend into the surrounding space
- A wheelchair accessible path linking the main path to play area and the fields beyond
- A shaded bench where parents and carers can rest with their kids
- Additional 'informal paths' for people to explore the space and see the plants
- Raised ceramic bird baths
- Informal barriers to guide visitors' journey, protect the plants as well as create habitat. These will use a combination of 'bee posts' and wire gabion baskets filled with materials donated by the community from local building projects.
- Groundworks to improve drainage and diversify habitat through water management.

- A hand pump linked to the mains for watering and play.

Support

Hayley and Holly are on board to develop the next round of plans and support with the build and planting. Their passion and involvement potentially makes them one of our most significant business supporters. We should acknowledge their contribution on the website and social media.

After a meeting with Chris Thomson on 7 June, we have also secured a commitment from Glendale to provide in-kind support with earthworks, gardening support and skills transfer.

We will be seeking significant volunteer support from the Biodiversity group, the Committee and the Friends more widely to help with the build, planting and care of the garden as an ongoing commitment.

Funding

Note that one component of our agreement with Lewisham is that the Friends should set aside an amount of reserved funds to support with remediation of the site, should the Friends group be dissolved.

We have applied for a BUPA grant for £2,500 for the project.

We are asking the Friends to allocate budget of between £5,000-£10,000 to support the community garden project.

We anticipate that the project will need an ongoing funding commitment of between £500 to £1,000 a year to support with maintenance and replanting.

Current plans are available on the website and we'll provide updates as we have them.

Next steps

We anticipate that the design process will continue through the summer with the involvement of Lewisham, Glendale and the Biodiversity volunteers, with the potential to break ground in the Autumn.

If our application for a BUPA grant is successful, we would need to be complete the first phase of the project by Spring 2024.

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Tiny Forest

We're delighted that Blythe Hill Fields has been selected as one of the three parks to be included in Lewisham's 2023 application to Earthwatch for a new Tiny Forest. The application was made in June with results and start up potentially in the Autumn.

Tiny Forests are a brilliantly innovative way to conduct 'rewilding' in urban settings. Following the 'Miyawaki Method', Tiny Forest typically establish three times faster than traditional techniques. They provide a massive boost to local habitat, as well as cleaner air, shade, walkable paths and the potential for an outdoor classroom.

Earthwatch will survey the site, conduct research into native species and then provide support and guidance to install 800+ mixed native trees and shrubs into an area about the size of a tennis court.

The exact shape, layout and location for the Tiny Forest are all still tbd, in consultation with the Friends and the wider community.

The following local schools have already signed up to be involved and we anticipate more will follow: Dalmain, Rathfern, Stillness Junior and Stillness Primary.

Once the project is underway we will be looking for a cohort of nine committed 'Tree Guardians' who will nurture the site for its first two years. After that, the forest should become self-sustaining.

For more information see: <https://earthwatch.org.uk/get-involved/tiny-forest>

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Meadows and trees

We are in the final stages of developing our meadows, trees and wildlife management plan in partnership with Lewisham and Glendale. On 24 May we met for a site visit with Eszther Wainwright-Deri, Lewisham's head of ecology and habitat and she has also provided very helpful feedback on our initial plans.

70% native policy

Following Eszther's guidance on good practice we anticipate taking a '70% natives' 'policy, so that most of the plants added to the park are natives species.

That said, the Fields is an urban site that has seen many lives over the past thousand odd years of human habitation. Non-natives do have a role to play and can add significant advantages, including in areas such as aesthetics and climate resilience, as well as increased habitat through an extended flowering reason.

The wildlife garden and limited other zones, such as a potential orchard, as well as blight-resistant Elm trees, will be able to use non-natives.

Woodland meadow

As part of our agreement with Lewisham, we have designated a 15m zone on the boundary between Austen close and the recreation area to become a woodland meadow. This zone will hook around the corner to meet Brockley View, creating a more woodland style walking

area linked to the main path. This zone will be planted with new adult trees and diverse woodland plant species including Cow parsley, bluebells

Seed foraging and planting meadow 'crop circles'

We will be involving the Biodiversity Group in a range of meadows improvement activities, including seed foraging and then planting diverse natives into 'crop circles' cleared in the existing meadow zones.

Unlike conventional meadow planting, which requires a site to be fully cleared and planted, with often quite artificial results, these are designed as a non-intrusive way of enabling more diverse flower and plant species to establish in our existing assigned meadows spaces. Among the species planted will be Yellow Rattle, which is parasitic on grass and will enable less vigorous flower species to compete.

Mowing – three tiers

Glendale will be instructed to adjust their mowing regime as follows:

- **Recreation spaces** - these will be mowed twice a year and include a dog walking circuit and the areas assigned to the festival
- **Meadow zones** - mowed once in the autumn, using 'cut and collect' to deplete the soil, as previously
- **Refuge zones** - the meadow zones above will alternate as 'refuge zones' meaning they will be left uncut every other year, to provide habitat for plants and other species to maintain their populations.

It's worth noting that the mowing pattern in 2023 was not what was agreed and was an overshoot by Lewisham. We are committed to ensuring the park remains a multi-user space serving diverse needs in the community.

Funding

We anticipate that Big City Butterflies will be supporting with meadow seed as well as some trees - exact details tbd.

At the same time, we are asking the Friends to allocate budget for meadows and trees of around £2,500 per year.

What's next?

Mike will be updating the Biodiversity plan asap, for sign off by Lewisham.

Autumn 2023 and Spring 2024 Seed foraging exercise, spot meadow plantings and ongoing tree planting

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Digital Bee Posts

To help engage the wider community in what we're doing in the Fields, we'd like to commission five or six Digital Bug Posts. These would be hardwood posts approximately 2m tall, which would include:

- The Friends logo
- A zone letter from A to F
- A QR code
- Drilled holes to serve as habitat for solitary bees.

The QR code would link to our website and provide interesting background information on any particular initiative, from the meadow crop circles through to trees or the new woodland zone.

The posts would be semi-permanent, so that the Friends could move them to new sites as the initiatives evolve.

Funding

We were allocated £2,000 by the Greening Fund for a new noticeboard. It is possible we could repurpose this for these Digital Bug Posts.

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Upcoming

Guided Butterfly Walk with Big City Butterflies, 22 August - [details and booking here](#)

Next meeting of the Biodiversity Group, Weds 6 September, The Chandos

Meadow seed foraging walk, late Autumn

Meadow 'spot planting', late Autumn and Spring

Community garden, design ongoing and work hopefully starts in the Autumn

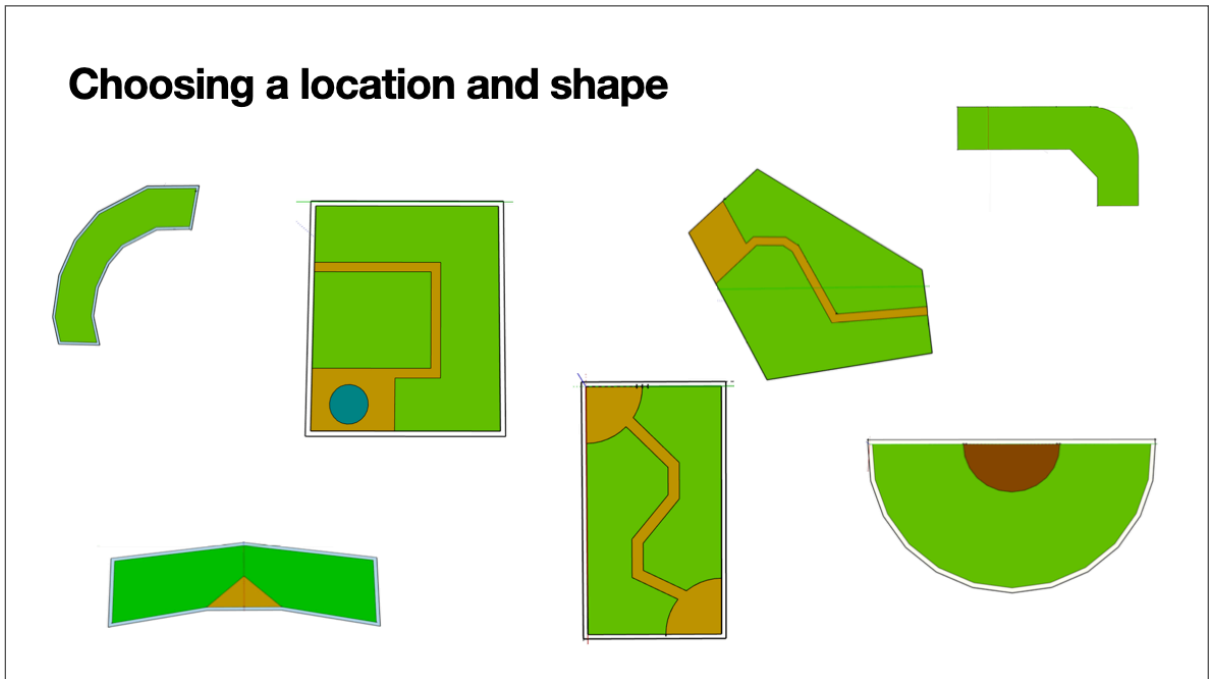
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Biodiversity Group chair: Mike Williams

Honorable mention: Stephanie Boyle, Katherine Hughes, Catherine Walsh, Flo, Fernando dos Santos and more...



Arial view showing key developments.



Tiny Forest layout options - can include paths and/or an outdoor classroom.