

Volunteers

Attendance at our volunteer days has remained steady, but low numbers have meant we haven't done everything we would have liked to do this year.

We have been boosted this year by an organisation, Benevity, who connect companies with local volunteering opportunities. In Swindon, they work with the Nationwide, who allow their employees paid time off to do volunteering work. We have already hosted our first group of volunteers via that scheme, who helped mow the wildflower meadow and cut back some of the brambles, and we have already had several other enquiries from other teams at Nationwide who we hope to host in the new year.

This new relationship means could be a huge boost to what we are able to do, with the potential for large groups spending a whole day working in the forest.

Youth engagement

We have continued to cultivate the relationship between young people and the forest, and hosted children from the Swindon Academy school for the third year in a row over the summer. As well as the usual path clearance and hedge building work, they also dug our new pond for us. Never underestimate the enthusiasm of children for digging holes!

Highlights and lowlights

The wooden bridge by the wildflower meadow was rebuilt by a couple of our volunteers. They were supported by local business Webbs, who provided the timber for free.

Two of our picnic benches were repaired and reinstalled after being vandalised. Sadly one of them has since been stolen.

Vandals also started a fire in August, which led to the fire brigade being called. Luckily, the fire was contained, and we were subsequently able to make the area safe.

One half of the 'Whomping' willow to the east of the site fell across the path at the end of summer. After we had done some initial clearance work, a team from Swindon Borough Council came out to deal with the rest of it and survey the other half to make sure it was safe.

The tractor continued to be a problem throughout the year. It was not possible to use it for much of the year due to the amount of rain we have had, and it has continued to suffer from mechanical difficulties. Talks are in progress with the parish council over its future.

One major highlight was the Pride of the Parish award we received from the council, after being nominated by members of the local community.

In summary

We saw how much of a contribution we can make towards giving people a taste of the countryside right here in the middle of urban Swindon. That means giving them an opportunity not only to enjoy the trees, flowers and wildlife, but also to pick up new skills and experiences.

Examples included one of our adult volunteers who had never had the opportunity to do any gardening, let alone working in a forest. And one of the kids from Swindon Academy who, while digging the pond, looked up and asked, “how do you KNOW all this stuff?”. It really brought home to me the fact that we are giving these kids the opportunity to learn not just about nature and wildlife but also to learn some useful practical skills that they will be able to use in later life, simple things like how to use a spade or dig a hole. And one of the teachers pointed out, it’s not just that we are showing them how to do it, we are showing them that we trust in them to do a good job and help them develop their confidence and sense of self-worth.

The other takeaway is that we shouldn't underestimate what we have here at HBUF. One group of volunteers from a local business included someone who had grown up in the area and, as a kid, their knowledge of the area stopped at the edge of the Southbrook playing fields. After a tour of the site, they expressed their surprise that “there is so much here!”. It's easy for us to get used to something when we're involved with it every day, but we mustn't forget how much it is appreciated by others, and how much people would miss it if it weren't here.

Trustees

This year we are sad to see some of the founder members of the group stepping down from their roles as trustees of the charity. Steve, Mary and John have been with us since the start, indeed from before the HBUF charity was even established, as it grew from the original group that stopped the site from being built on.

If it were not for all their hard work in campaigning to save the site from developers, and the many years of tree planting and stewardship, then HBUF would now either be just another housing estate, or a wilderness of brambles and fly-tipped rubbish.

Every week, hundreds of local people can enjoy being close to nature, from the many dog-walkers (and their grateful dogs!) out for their daily exercise to the kids building dens in the forest.

It's impossible to count the number of people who have enjoyed walking around our little urban oasis over the years, thanks to all the hard work and dedication of Steve, Mary and John. And all that hard work was recognised by the local council earlier this year when HBUF won the Pride of the Parish award after being nominated by the people.

So, on behalf of the remaining trustees and all the people that have enjoyed HBUF over the years and will continue to do so in years to come, we extend our thanks for everything you've done. And we hope that we can be just as successful as we try to continue the work that you started.

Hreod Burna Urban Forest
Charity Number 1155603
Income and Expenditure Account 2023/24

	£	
Balance b/fwd		
as of 1 July 2023	2533.16	
Income 2023/24	222.00	
	2755.16	
Less expenditure 2023/24	413.00	
	<u>2342.16</u>	
	2230.40	Bank Account
Balance of funds on 30 June 2024	111.76	Petty cash held
Total funds	<u>2342.16</u>	

Hreod Burna Urban Forest
Charity Number 1155603
Income and Expenditure 2023/2024

Income	
Members subs & donations	222.00
	222.00
Expenditure	
Plants	130.00
Insurance	252.00
Rent	1.00
Room Hire	30.00
	413.00