**REPORT FROM THE GARDENING CLUB - FOR FOCRG AGM 27/11/2023**

The gardening club has 12 regular members? We also have a member who is Latvian and a very good worker but doesn’t like the wet weather! so he comes along as and when. We average 11 members at any one time. At last years AGM we reported the demise of one of our most enthusiastic members. All of the gardening club attended the funeral and in her memory we planted an Rowan Tree between the two picnic benches outside the scout compound. The family were very pleased that she was so well respected within the group and that we chose to remember her this way. The firm Alan works for donated the plaque.

The shade garden has had the addition of Baloo our cub bear. It is so popular, children love to have photos taken cuddling him and trampling the raised bed. So much so, that we had to put a barrier behind him to try to save the plants. We’ve also refurbished the bug hotel making it taller and more robust.

In the coming weeks we will be planting daffodils and primula along the bank of the stream, to replace those lost last year. We are behind schedule on this because of the very successful drainage works carried out this spring.

We are not collecting the leaves in the shade garden. Instead we are pushing them towards (but not onto) the fence at the back of the shade garden to encourage hedgehogs.

We had a lot of gravel donated to us from Thomas and Margarita Stanley from Green Lane and from Raglans School. This was transported by one of Terry’s Team, assisted by Alan, Peter and Danny from the GC. The gravel was used to augment the gravel at the Empress Drive entrance to the park.

We put plenty of mulch, donated by Ideverdi, round the tennis court flower beds which was very successful and reduced watering considerably, and gave new vigour to the plants. We need to cut back on some of the shrubs along the tennis court this year. And of course add some mulch.

Our attempt at establishing a wildflower verge at the entrance to Empress Drive was hampered by the arrival of about 50 starlings who had a feast, and by the heavy winds. But all was not lost a few as a few cornflowers and poppies survived. This gave us heart and we aim to have another attempt this year.

The Wild hedge and Elms planted along the school fence are surviving, despite the petty vandalism that has occurred along this area but we will persevere with this.

The Hawthorn hedge along the garden fences along the west of the park and the daffodils planted underneath them are doing well.

We thought the crown in the park was just hanging on, the success of the drainage works had a knock on effect on the willows. Copious amount of water had to be carted in with our new bowser. But recently, when we started to dig a trench round the crown we noticed the it was well rooted. So we gave it some root feed, put some water retaining crystals round it and some mulching and are very hopeful that it will take off this year. We are going to have another attempt at establishing a flower bed around the crown to simulate Jewels.

All of the planters in the park, including the playground looked delightful this year, and are still hanging on. A sudden frost will probably put paid to this, but we have harvested a lot of seeds, so many that we aim to sell some this coming year.

The Roost looked wonderful this year. After so many attempts at getting this area to ‘work’ it is very gratifying to receive so many compliments.

We have recently made a raised bed and started planting up a sensory garden to the side of the Roost. Work is ongoing here but we’ve started with some scented shrubs and some herbs with a few hyacinths and tulips bulbs along with some primula and bellis, more to come!

The vertical planters along the west of the football pitch and the sunflower weren’t as successful as we hoped! This is due to the westerly winds that sweep across the whole area but the gaps in the ‘hit an miss’ fence seem to exacerbate the effect. This will be addressed very soon.

The Invicta boat was fun to work on despite the rain. The Scouts gave permission to use their hut during the summer holidays because heavy wind and rainstorms were predicted. On the day we were finally ready to move it out to the compound we discovered it was too wide for the doorway, there was just 5/6 members of the GC and it was just too heavy. Rachel asked Matt if the Boot Camp would help when they finished their training session. They made light work of getting it out and putting it in place. The planting was done by the GC and the final touches were done by Barbara A and Pia and the nameplate by Ian.

Last bit at the end! We finally got our greenhouse!

Terry’s Team came up trumps again by clearing the site of rubbish saving a lot of time and manpower. This left Alan free to level the site, lay the base and erect the greenhouse. It had to be done during the Scouts Easter break and not many GC members were around in this period. We’ve already brought on some plants and dried out some seeds this year.

We aim to have a flower show in 2024 -details to be arranged

I thought we had excelled ourselves last year but this year we have again excelled ourselves. In fact FOCRG attained 3 awards this year. A Silver for Biodiversity in the Chislehurst and Walden Recreation Grounds and Woods along with Outstanding in the London in Bloom and we came 1st in Coolings Bromley in Bloom. The Coolings judges were impressed at how well we manage such a large area.

Having won Outstanding in the London in Bloom Competition, several times the time had come for the GC to decide if we wanted to aim higher in this competition. This was discussed when the full GC was present. It was unanimously agreed that we don’t want to, the fun, commitment and friendship within the group makes it pleasurable to attend. The sense of achievement and camaraderie within the group is enough for us. We will however, continue with the Coolings Bromley in Bloom competition and encourage other groups to enter.

As usual there are so many people to thank FOCRG, The Scouts, Elmstead. FC. People who donated things, including Barbara and Colin, park users, for biscuits! And the entire GC.

Mai Bunce

Gardening Club Co-ordinator