

CULTER IN BLOOM

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2013

This year I would like to present my report under a number of headings, corresponding to the main issues which we try to deal with in Culter in Bloom each year. These are our roadside containers, our permanent beds, our hanging baskets, our bulb planting and our other environmental work. I'll mention any new projects as I go along, talk briefly about the Beautiful Scotland judging last year, then finally touch on our funding and future plans.

Containers

This is the area we are probably best known for ever since our first planting work back in 2004. To remind you of some statistics I gave last year, we look after 26 large circular pavement planters, which we call Lowlanders, 32 wall mangers, 7 troughs of different sizes and 5 railing boxes. These are mostly on North Deeside Road and Malcolm Road and account for the majority of the bedding plants we need every year. As I advised at this meeting last year, we decided to purchase the plants ready reared from commercial nurseries as part of the ACC bulk order. The reason was that we had not decided on a new location for the polytunnel at Kennerty, due to the building work there. I'll come back to the polytunnel later. We received excellent well-grown plants and the planting work went smoothly. The fine dry summer brought its own problems with watering, at least initially. As we are a community organisation we rely on local residents and businesses to water "their" containers - and this needs regular reminding! However I hope you will agree that this year's display was one of the best ever. In October these containers were all re-planted with polyanthus and pansies for the winter, and we hope that the bulbs left in them from past years will also come through.

Permanent beds

These include the little train and the western entrance bed, all planted up twice - in June and October, then several more permanent features such as the strip in front of the BP petrol station, the area on Craigton Crescent next to Zoe Skea's bench - and the Kennerty Brae seating and shrubbery area. We continue to maintain all of these ourselves and last year we also enriched the prominent long strip in front of the Gordon House flats with some permanent shrubs (paid for by the managing agent who will now arrange their care).

Baskets

We have 46 hanging baskets on lamp posts and 6 on a basket tree at the Kennerty Road junction. The plants for these were all sourced last year from Cove Bay Nurseries and watered by the City Council, as this requires specialized equipment. We have to pay for this service and the unavoidable cost of watering these is a very significant part of our budget. However around further 20 "adopt-a-baskets" on North Deeside Road house frontages are cared for by the householders themselves.

Bulbs

Each year we receive a small number of bulbs from the city council to plant in areas of our choice and in October last year we used the daffodils to replant the slope directly next to the Culter Burn as this had been weedkilled by ACC over the summer to remove the dandelions. We also got a small number of crocus which you should see shortly in the grass at the corner of Coronation Rd and School Rd and near the Malcolm Rd N Deeside Rd junction..

Litter clearance

We arranged two litter picks to supplement the efforts of the city council on this permanent problem, and these are well supported - by both local residents and the school, even councilors on occasion. Sadly, we could be working on this project in some areas every week, and along with the community council we have called on the City Council to pay particular attention to locations like the Johnston Gardens bus terminus, but there seems to be an embargo on new bins at present

Environment

Last year we topped up the wildflower seed at the end of the station platform, which we had first sown in 2012, as this is necessary for a few years to give the flowers a chance to establish. However our efforts to create a more wildlife-friendly area in Coronation Park by planting wildflower plugs in 2012 came to nothing, due to an unfortunate and untimely act by the city council team last year. They mowed the whole area in June - just before the wildflowers could flower and set seed. While this may have made the area look tidy it did nothing for its wildlife diversity. However, in the last few months we've cleared and sown a number of small patches with a tough wildflower called yellow rattle, and if this takes and is allowed to flower it should help to create more colour and diversity over time.

Meantime our apple trees and bulbs along the path are thriving. A new project we undertook last year was the creation of a surfaced footpath from the Health Centre car park to the bridge over the little stream there to provide safer access for walkers. This was negotiated with and agreed by the Health Centre partners who own the land and donated - free of charge - by the contractors J R Donald and Son.

I think I can also include in this section some financial assistance that we gave the primary school by purchasing a range of fruit, herbs and vegetables which they reared in their garden last year.

New projects

However the main new project both in this "environmental" area and for the year as a whole was the creation of the new sculptural feature at the western entrance. I mentioned this last year when it had just received planning approval and am glad to report that it was completed in August. Back in 2012 we chose the design from three submitted by local garden designer Ian Anderson from Maryculter. It comprises a striking silhouette of St Peter made from overlapping metal plates, but with other more subtle references - to the Roman occupation, the flow of the Culter Burn and the history of papermaking in the village. There's now a plaque in front and there will shortly be a leaflet to explain all these links. It's surrounded by a planting scheme designed by Ian, comprising both native and cultivated plants. This will now become yet another permanent bed to maintain, for us to add to our ever-increasing list! The embankment towards the junction, formerly also a mass of dandelions, has been planted with wildflowers and bluebells which should become self-seeding

Raising funds for this project was a major task as we did not want the cost to deplete the funds which we raise each year for our main planting schemes. I'm glad to say that the generosity of corporate donors and suppliers ensured that we succeeded and the cost was fully covered, and each supporter deserves a personal mention here. The main donor for this project was Aberdeen Forward, a local charity which receives funding from the landfill tax for environmental and recycling projects. However we also received cash assistance from the Balmoral Group, Scottish Natural Heritage and the St Peter Heritage Trust. Derek Anderson the Drumoak blacksmith gave us a significant discount for assembling the statue, Nicol of Skene Ltd made no charge whatsoever for the civil work of providing topsoil, installing the base and mounting the statue on it, and the city council assisted by funding most of the plants around it. Local resident John Rugg was an enthusiastic and supportive technical adviser throughout,

Beautiful Scotland competition

In 2013 we re-entered the Beautiful Scotland competition and were visited in August by judges Gregor McGillivray and Terry Stott who toured the village with us. We were awarded a Silver Gilt award, second in our class to our friends (and rivals) Dyce In Bloom who also received the same grade but a few crucial additional points. I won't go into detail on their comments, but sadly, despite what were in my opinion our best-ever floral displays, some broader environmental issues which they spotted on the tour let us down, a reminder that it is the whole community which is being assessed, and horticultural display accounted for only 50% of the total marks available. It may also be appropriate to quote from Roger Burnett, Chair of the RHS Britain in Bloom judging panel, who said last year

“The image that most people have of RHS Britain in Bloom is of pretty hanging baskets and colourful bedding displays but this is a far cry from what the campaign is really about. For example, awards were given out in recognition of innovative environmental practices, such as efforts to help native wildlife, for educating young people in horticulture, engaging with businesses and for strengthening communities”

We've still to decide whether to enter the scheme this year, but it is not an automatic decision – first we will decide for ourselves where we wish to put the emphasis for new projects

Plans for 2014

As you can see from the large amount of work I've mentioned, merely maintaining what we already do takes up most of the time of our committee and the relatively small number of volunteers we can call on, and so our ambitions for new work in 2014 are modest so far. However our members welcome all new ideas, however informal – and this, our annual social meeting is an ideal time to raise them.

Most importantly, we need to finalise the relocation and tidying-up of our base at Kennerty farm which the Duncan family kindly offers us. This will include storage facilities for our equipment, a bed for planting up perennials like polyanthus which we can re-use for Spring display each year and a sheltered temporary holding area for purchased summer annuals. However it will not include the polytunnel, as we have decided from our recent experience that we can survive without it by buying in our summer bedding plants. Some of our containers are ageing and need either maintenance or replacement – this includes the “wee train” which is now about 9 years old. We are considering some further areas of wasteland for wild flowers and shrubs, but need to talk to the landowners to secure their agreement. We would also like to involve local businesses more directly in supporting us by enhancing their own areas – this will include not only shop owners but also the developers of new apartments, for example. We also plan to hold a “wild life protection workshop” organized by a national charity, which will be run free of charge for anyone who wishes to come along. We aim to install floodlighting for the St Peter village entrance feature and are currently negotiating for sponsorship from SSE (formerly the Hydro Board) for this. And finally we will play our part in the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War by buying and sowing many poppies – near the war memorial and wherever else we can find a place.

In that connection, we have circulated a postcard in the Culter Courier with our annual appeal and offering a free packet of poppy seeds to anyone who donates £10 or more. We rely on our donors to continue and develop our work, and are confident that the people of Culter will respond as generously as they have in the past.

Conclusion

In conclusion it only remains for me to say a very big “thank you” to the Culter In Bloom committee who undertake the work which you support, my fellow office bearers, treasurer Catherine Lacy and secretary Carol Page, and all the other members – in alphabetical order Kim Coleman, Jean and Sandy Cook, Bill Cooper, Dick Gagel, Françoise and Donald MacDonald, Christine Mackie, Malcolm Sharp and Anne Watson. Let's hope for another summer in 2014 like last year to reward their labours.

Erik Stien
Chair
Culter in Bloom
February 2014