

Denton Gardens - Western Woodland Border - Enhancement Project Public Consultation September 2023

Introduction

Friends of Denton Gardens secured £3,700 in July 2023 from the Rampion Community Benefit Fund at Sussex Community Foundation to enhance the public amenity and wildlife habitat along the Western Woodland border of Denton Gardens. Previously we gained general support for our plans prior to obtaining funding. This was achieved through feedback following information disseminated to our Friends group and the wider public via email, on our website and Facebook page, posted on our public noticeboard in the Gardens and presented at our last AGM in September 2022,

With funding now in place enabling us to set our plans in motion, in September 2023 we held a more detailed and targeted consultation exercise to help us understand the specific interests, preferences and any ideas and possible concerns of local residents, park users and visitors. These are public Gardens gifted to the people of Worthing and as a Friends group we are very aware that any changes we make should be beneficial and positive for as wide a user group as possible.

Background

Our Vision is to make the tree-lined western border of the Gardens more ecologically diverse, attractive and to feel safer.

Our objectives are:

- To improve winter interest and sensory stimulation through greater use of scent and colour;
- To admit more light to provide favourable conditions for flowering ground flora which is the source of food for pollinators;
- To diversify ground flora for visual amenity and wildlife value;
- To create enhanced habitat opportunities for wildlife; and
- To improve cross-visibility to discourage anti-social behaviour.

We Invited all interested parties to attend an in-person consultation event in Denton Gardens on Saturday 30th September from 11am to 1pm. Local residents who live directly adjacent to the Gardens (and the Woodland border) were invited by hand delivered letter to their homes. The event was advertised more widely via our public noticeboard in the Gardens, as well as on noticeboards in nearby parks and gardens in Worthing, on our Facebook page and website, and sent out to our Friends email group.

Anyone who could not attend but wanted to contribute was given the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback by whatever means was most convenient to them - e-mail, in writing, or verbally to any committee member.

At the consultation, we explained how we planned to achieve the objectives above, allowing local residents, park users and visitors to give feedback and contribute their own views and ideas.

Our plans focus on 3 main areas:

1 Vegetation Management

Mainly involves pruning some shrubs to lift their crowns to allow in more light. This will provide more favourable growing conditions for attractive, scented ground flora offering year round interest and food for pollinators. It will also allow more light into adjacent properties, and could help to discourage anti-social behaviour by reducing hiding places which have attracted some rough sleeping and drug and alcohol use. Some shrubs will be removed in this process where they have self-seeded and/or spread and become too dominant.

2 Habitat Enhancement

This involves installing bird and bat boxes on approximately 18 mature trees to support and enhance their populations. On the ground we want to manage deadwood sympathetically, to create humid, protected niches for invertebrates, small vertebrates, plants and fungi which in turn influence the soil as well as other plants and animals. We want to install log piles, dead hedges and bug 'hotels'.

3 New Planting

We want to introduce colour, texture and scent to the border, which is currently lacking, particularly during the winter. We want to introduce scented flowering shrubs along the paths and alongside benches, as well as native trees, shrubs and perennials chosen to improve wildlife value. Suggested planting includes:

Canopy Infill

Oak (*Quercus robur*) - host to hundreds of insect species, an important food source for many birds and bats, and mammals such as squirrels which feed on their acorns. Some caterpillar species feed on their flower and leaf buds. The soft leaves of oaks break down with ease in autumn and form a rich leaf mould beneath the tree, supporting invertebrates such as the stag beetle, and fungi, like the oakbug milkcap. Holes and crevices in the tree bark are perfect nesting and roosting spots for many birds and bats. The Woodland Trust states that: "oaks support more life than any other UK native tree", and that, "they are a haven for a colossal 2,300 wildlife species, providing vital spaces to eat, shelter and breed".

Linden (*Tilia cordata*) - flowers have a rich, heavy scent which attracts many insects, particularly bees which also drink aphid honeydew from the leaves. Leaves are eaten by the caterpillars of many moth species. They are very attractive to aphids, providing a source of food for their predators, including hoverflies, ladybirds and many species of bird. Long-lived trees provide dead wood for wood-boring beetles, and nesting holes for birds.

Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) - flowers are pollinated by insects and the berries are favoured by birds. The leaves are eaten by the caterpillars of a number of moths.

Shrub layer

Laurustinus (*Viburnum tinus*) - evergreen, mildly scented, creamy-white flowers, produced over a long period in late winter and spring, followed by blue-black berries.

Burkwood's viburnum (*Viburnum x burkwoodii*) - strongly scented flowers in spring, attracting bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. Small berries in autumn, provide food for birds and other wildlife.

Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*) - native viburnum, creamy-white, sometimes pink, flowers appear May to July especially attractive to hoverflies. Translucent red berries in autumn are an important food source for birds.

Butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) - small native evergreen shrub with sharp 'leaves', glossy red berries on female plants in summer and autumn.

Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) - Native evergreen with spiny leaves, providing shelter and habitat, making a good wildlife hedge, has nectar/pollen rich flowers to attract bees, beneficial insects, birds, butterflies/moths and other pollinators. It is a caterpillar food plant, and has berries for birds.

Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) - native deciduous shrub with dramatic autumn colour and showy orange-pink winged fruit, known for attracting birds.

Wintersweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*) - strongly scented, deciduous shrub and creamy yellow flowers in winter.

Winter daphne (*Daphne odora*) - strongly scented evergreen shrub, has nectar/pollen rich pink flowers in winter, known for attracting bees.

Ground flora

Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) - Native creeping perennial, with evergreen foliage and spikes of beautiful blue flowers in late spring offering a food source for bees and other insects.

Common columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*) - native erect perennial with nectar/pollen rich usually blue flowers known for attracting bees.

Stinking hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*) - native evergreen perennial, from spring its lime green, nectar/pollen rich flowers last for several months, attracting bees.

Sweet woodruff (*Gallium odoratum*) - Native spreading, scented perennial. From mid-spring to July it produces clusters of dainty nectar/pollen rich, white flowers that are held above whorled leaves, attracting bees and other pollinators.

Consultation Findings

Most feedback was given verbally by park users and visitors who approached our stand at the Consultation event in the Gardens. They listened to our plans, asked questions, and then responded with their views. One visitor chose to write comments down at the event.

Adjacent residents gave feedback in person on the day (4 wrote comments at the Consultation event), and by email.

Appendix I reproduces all the original written feedback in full.

Park Users and Visitors

Verbal feedback from park users and visitors was unanimously positive. Everyone we spoke to was interested and engaged. They welcomed the introduction of more varied planting and the encouragement of plants to attract wildlife, and aims to improve safety in the Gardens. We also had lots of praise for the work we have done so far elsewhere in the gardens and encouragement to keep up the good work. This was exemplified by the visitor who wrote down their comments stating, "... It is a joy to see the progress in Denton Gardens ... the new habitat enhancement plan looks amazing... Well done to the team."

Adjacent Residents

We had direct feedback from 11 of the adjacent residents.

A basement flat resident near the south end of the border expressed concern via e-mail about potential loss of privacy, and stated that another close neighbour (not in a basement) felt the same.

The other 'close neighbour' referred to above, attended the consultation event in person and gave verbal feedback, reporting that they did not want any changes to be made to the border area directly adjacent to their property. The individual concerned has been a resident for several decades, has dedicated themselves to tending this section of the border, and expressed a sense of ownership over the space. They have been invited to join the Friends group, committee and volunteer gardening group previously, and although they have been willing to help with some tasks, have declined to join in with the collective gardening, preferring to work independently.

Two residents towards the southern end who are active in the Friends group gave their positive backing to the plans. They support opening up of the canopy at the front of the border to improve ground flora, combined with spikier planting at the back of the border for security and to reduce antisocial behaviour.

Two residents from midway along the border both gave supportive feedback on the overall plans, complimented the plant choices, and one asked for more red, and one for more colour generally.

Two residents from the Old Diary flats praised the vision, and specifically asked for the bay and holly bushes to be thinned and lifted to allow more light into their properties.

Just north of the Old Diary flats, a resident verbally fed back a preference for more light, and less holly, which has somewhat taken over adjacent to their property!

Another resident from the north end of the border sent a lengthy written contribution (see appendix I) some of which went beyond the remit of this project. Drawing out the pertinent points, they requested:

- More open planting to permit more light into properties;
- No holly as it grows too tall, too dense and is too prickly;
- No new trees so as not to exacerbate light issues;
- Queried the extent to which wildlife should be encouraged so close to housing;
- Queried the focus on native species at the expense of using non-native ornamentals to introduce colour and interest, giving peonies and camellias as examples which could be introduced.

After the consultation event, another resident from the north end of the terrace gave verbal feedback during a gardening session. They wanted to make sure that when we remove or clear the plants, we retain sufficient cover for wildlife. They also wanted to confirm whether we were going to remove the firethorn (*pyracantha*) which they felt acted as an effective deterrent for any unwanted visitors along the building line. They felt that where any clearance had previously occurred, this had led to more individuals urinating next to the

buildings. She asked us to carefully consider which shrubs and to what extent we were planning to cut back, so as not to exacerbate this situation. This is valuable feedback as we were working from the premise that a more exposed space would discourage this type of anti-social behaviour. It may, however, be the case that the behaviour is just made more visible. Whichever is the case, it is a good argument to keep spiky plants along the building line.

Summary

As we know the exact location of specific concerns relating to light versus privacy and safety, and have a positive dialogue with the individuals involved, we are able work directly with them to take these preferences on board when we begin clearing and replanting. The overall picture, however, based on those who engaged, is that opening up the lower canopy to permit more light would be welcomed, especially towards the front of the border. At the same time, we need to ensure areas, particularly along the building line, where there might be security or safety concerns, the use of thorny plants could be helpful. We have also got the message that there is already more than enough holly! Flowering quince (*Chaenomeles*) could be a useful thorny alternative addition to the plant list.

We need to consider carefully if, where and which new tree/s should be introduced. There is currently an obvious gap in the tree line, but this seems to be where several residents are calling for more light.

We cannot agree with the solitary call to restrict wildlife diversity. Enhancing wildlife habitat opportunities is a key objective of this project, and will have many benefits for the Gardens and its users. Healthy ecosystems depend on a rich diversity of species that contribute to maintaining its balance and stability. Our most prolific pollinators are bees, hoverflies, wasps, moths, butterflies and beetles and are essential for flowering plants; and predators can keep other less 'agreeable' species in check, eg mosquitos which might increase as temperatures rise, are eaten by bats and even mice.

Many studies have also shown that wildlife is good for human health and well-being, reducing hypertension, respiratory illnesses and anxiety, improving vitality, mood and mental fatigue and restoring attention capacity. Joining up green spaces in urban areas is also key to sustaining wildlife, and this woodland border in Denton Gardens is part of a substantial green corridor stretching from the coast to the South Downs.

In response to the native versus non-native plants question, our focus on native plants is to support native wildlife. However, we could include a few non-native ornamentals to extend the variety of colour and form in the border. However, peonies tend to prefer full sun, so may not be suitable for the woodland border but could be used elsewhere in the Gardens, and camellias prefer acid soil and are medium to large plants when fully grown so may not be appropriate.

Conclusion

The consultation exercise has allowed us to explore our vision, objectives and plans with the Garden's users and local residents. The general consensus has been one of positive

support for the direction and steps we have put forward. The proposal to lift the shrub canopy to let in more light has been mostly welcomed by adjacent residents. Where there is a contradictory concern we can manage this by varying the approach at a micro level.


There are some relatively small adaptations which we can take on board based on residents' feedback. The use of holly was met with disapproval from a number of respondents, largely because it is already prevalent and has gone somewhat unmanaged in the past. We can lift the canopy and remove or move some of the existing specimens, and exclude it from the new planting list.

We can also consider including one or two non-native ornamentals as highlights in the border provided they bring high wildlife value and are non-invasive, and the exercise has also given us other ideas for alternative plants such as *Chaenomeles*.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed, and welcome any further input and comments from the Gardens users and friends as the project progresses, as well as any offers of more gardening help, or course.

Appendix I - Written Feedback

1 Emailed responses from Friends of Denton Gardens e-mail Group

*"Hi Louise,
Many congratulations on the successful funding!
I wish you all the best with the work. I'm sorry I'm too old and creaky to help with the digging

Kind regards,
[Name]"*

*"Morning Louise
Well done and keep up the good work and look forward to helping one my fractured spine
has fully recovered,
Thanks
[Name]"*

*"Dear Louise,
Thank you for your e-mail and congratulations again on the grants-great news!
I will try and come along to your Consultation.
Best wishes,
[Name]"*

2 Emailed Responses from Adjacent Residents

Email response from resident 1:

“Where in the Gardens? [Name] at number [x] and me are worried about basement privacy. Will try to be there [at consultation]”

Email from resident 2:

“Denton Gardens what you may perhaps consider when improving it’s borders.

The problem is there isn’t much natural light. Denton Garden Borders have overgrowth now after being left a duration.

Firstly, it will be best to commit to an agreement for a regular and frequent schedule of cut-backs. The overgrowth of the competing shrubs are now fairly dense. It has become a jungle mass of competing shrubs as they grow into each other’s space. These shrubs are mostly native and stunning; but all want to take all; in the soil - so do grow into each other. There ought to be some space between plantings. I note to be sure how something will grow over the long term.*

Why are the holly trees a problem? The holly trees, along pathways may cause scratches to passers by.

Holly trees become tall upwards and cast light.; they also carry bindweed. The mice climb weeds on tree walls and get into houses. It was a mistake to plant the hollies together, they grow so huge, so shouldn’t be right by houses.

*Encouraging wildlife is fine - but not too near houses too as ticks and lime disease are no longer rare** in West Sussex. And squirrels may also bring other known diseases. We already see them daily. Also the black widow spider*** is around too now, _ I’ve seen a real one, in the sink here, over a year ago. (My brother is in hospital - he was bitten by a spider according to his wife, but by which type I don’t know) Sorry to raise this. (Fortunately, the small birds are always delightful to watch though.*

Why not reconsider the planting of non-native-species? They can thrive well in the soil type in Denton Gardens. I can honestly say that people are interested in non-native species of shrubs; especially if they are labelled and are informative e.g Written with place of origin and when the shrub arrived in England etc.. Some shrubs do create a good sensory impression with an abundance of soft colourful flowers. Importantly, people will enjoy learning about these attractive colourful shrubs. Our soil is ideal for Peonies and Camilas such as mentioned because they do behave so well whilst not taking up too much space; so are quite maintenance free. The peonies, will not disappoint as they grow well and do not compete for all the space or sprawl everywhere. Visitors to the town will stop and photograph unusual beautiful shrubs, wherever their origin. So in terms of years ahead, these can be identified as not too large or spreading out too far. (Bournemouth Central Gardens have many stunning non-native species in it’s borders. So besides Dog Roses bushes and Hawthorns etc. they may work too.) Perhaps visit Bournemouth Borough Council’s central-gardens.some photos may inspire further. (I will send some over when I can get to them.)

The F.D.G’s - fruit tree and grass plan is right for the areas around the old pond. (I hear fruit trees and grass will be there; that ought to look nice.) Do perhaps again look at the shape of the old pond too. All eyes see it as a focal-point so it could look spectacular. The focal point would hold huge flowering tubs, (if allowed). it could also follow a sensory theme too.

Again I mention our house is short on light and where light comes through in the gaps it’s over areas of low growth - I have asked for no high growth for many years; our light is so much needed all ours comes from areas with no trees. The birch hangs over our house light always. Having no light coming into our properties is not helpful. These gaps are important for every task indoors.; Put no more trees in these borders please! We do value the gaps

between the existing trees, and would appreciate any lower branch cuts off of the birch. (It spills zillions of seeds in the house via the windows and door). As well as the hollies which could be cut - or removed to save the bother. Do you know there are two not even seen on the path much too close to the house.

Kind Regards, [Name].”

* Allocating more hours to maintenance is beyond the remit of this project, for which we have a small budget for new plants. We always welcome more volunteers to help us improve maintenance of the Gardens, and we take maintenance factors into account when making new plant choices.

** Lyme disease is still relatively rare, Garden users should be using the paths and not wandering through the borders, and dogs should be on leads. The risk therefore of catching Lyme disease in Denton Gardens is deemed sufficiently low as to not be a threat to proceeding with this project.

*** False widow spiders (not black widows), whose bite is normally no worse than a wasp sting, squirrels and mice are prevalent throughout the UK, and not peculiar to Denton Gardens.

3 Written Response from a Garden Visitor Recorded at the Consultation

Written response from Visitor:

“As a regular visitor to Worthing it’s a joy to see the progress occurring in Denton Gardens. The new planting scheme and habitat enhancement plans look amazing. We look forward to seeing it come to fruition. Well done to the team of volunteers! Hope the residents of this lovely town appreciate how much work it is taking to nurture this green space.”

4 Written Responses from Adjacent Residents Recorded at the Consultation

Written response from Resident 3:

“Love the plant choices - but hope a plant with strong red might be considered.”

Written response from Resident 4:

“Keep up the good work! More colour please.”

Written response from Resident 5:

“Wonderful vision - lets do it.”

Written response from Resident 6:

“Holly and bay bushes thinned and lifted to allow light.”

