

Friends of Denton Gardens
Annual Report 2023-2024
March 23rd 2024

We set out this year with big ambitions, applying for funding from CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) for new plants in the sunken garden area and also from Rampion for what we grandly call our 'woodland'. We were lucky enough (and surprised) to be awarded both grants, which really focussed our minds on how we were going to achieve our targets.

The Sunken Garden

The sunken garden has been systematically cleared by the Parks Department of the ancient phormiums and overgrown hebes. The area is now open to light and sunshine and is much more in keeping with the original plan. Also visitors have commented that it is a much safer park to be in and walk through.

Top soil, grass seed and fruit trees will fill the four lower beds in the sunken garden. One side was completed last year and the western beds will be done this month. This will provide a sheltered spot for picnickers and people with young children, and be less labour intensive than reinstating flower beds.

The four upper beds have funding from CIL and are earmarked for the continuation of the prairie planting by the pergola. The two eastern beds were sown with wild flower seeds as a temporary measure last summer and are now being cleared ready for new planting at the end of April.

The four urns will be replanted with more structural and trailing plants this year.

The Woodland Area

After being awarded the Rampion Grant, we conducted a public consultation in September 2023. This generated responses from regular Garden users, local residents and visitors; the general consensus being one of positive support for our vision.

The objectives for the Woodland Area 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 a source of food for pollinators
- To diversify ground flora for visual amenity and wildlife value
- To create enhanced habitat opportunities for wildlife
- To improve cross-visibility to discourage anti-social behaviour.

Earlier this year the undergrowth was cleared and the shrubs and trees pruned back. A rotting sycamore tree had to be felled, leaving a stump for insect habitats and logs for bug 'hotels'.

The new planting (600+ plants) will begin on Saturday Task Day 30th March and continue on the following week. Lots of folk are needed. Please join us. Installing bird and bat boxes is our task for this year.

Eastern Herbaceous Border

We conducted a survey of plants in the border, and were surprised at the repetition and restricted range of plants. Like the Forth Bridge, the maintenance of this long-neglected border is endless, and our volunteers spent many hours weeding, pruning and tidying through the autumn. Their impact is beginning to show, though sticky willie, couch grass and convolvulus are determined enemies.

General

A recommendation to extend Steyne Gardens Conservation Area to include Denton Gardens will be discussed at Worthing Planning Committee on April 17th. We very much welcome this proposal and thank Sue Belton of the Worthing Society for initiating and pressing forward with this proposal. If implemented, this will mean that the Gardens will be protected and enhanced for generations of Worthingites and visitors to come.

The council applied for, but did not get, Green Flag status for Denton Gardens last year. We were not unduly concerned by this as we are still in the midst of our ongoing plans, and there is much that is unfinished in Denton Gardens.

The Management Plan for Denton Gardens has been rewritten and is available for perusal.

A local resident, Robin Biggs, approached us with an offer to donate two trees to the gardens in memory of his parents, Phyllis and Ron Biggs. After much discussion two Strawberry Trees were planted. These will mature into beautiful evergreen trees with scented flowers and berries, enhancing the gardens and attracting birds and insects. Our thanks to Robin for his generous donation.

None of this would have been achieved without the support and encouragement of Anthony Read, to whom we owe our sincere thanks, to Dave, Liam and Mike from Grounds Maintenance and our committee members, Louise, JP and Michal. Thanks too to Jade Goto, who designed and created the prairie beds and pergola planting.

We have been supported magnificently with weekly refreshments from Barry and his lovely staff at Coast. So much appreciated! Thank you Coast!

Most of all I want to recognise and thank the intrepid group of volunteers who turn out every week, (almost) rain or shine. We have had wonderful input from a core group of folk over the past year, as well as a variety of others who come when they can, and of course we are always keen to welcome new volunteers - as literally nothing can be done without them.