

## **Meeting of Meadows and Bruntsfield Links Advisory Group (MABLAG) on 16<sup>th</sup> November (2.00 – 4.00 pm).**

MABLAG is formally constituted to have representatives from the 4 CCs adjacent to the Meadows (Southside, Marchmont/ Sciennes, Tollcross and Merchiston), plus reps from Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links (FMBL) and Edinburgh University Student Association (EUSA). It also has 3/4 members who are from appropriate departments of City of Edinburgh Council or sections thereof (Parks, Environment etc), one of whom (Gareth Thomas, Environmental Services Development Officer) has responsibility for doing minutes and putting these on the MABLAG web site. When the previous SCC was dissolved in 2011, MABLAG agreed to the Southside Association having a representative on it in place of SCC and this place was taken by Linda Hendry. As a member of SA, I deputised for Linda on at least one occasion in 2013. As it happened, Linda could not attend the meeting on 16th Nov, so Chris Wigglesworth of Tollcross CC who is Chair and David Doig (DD) who is Service Manager - Environment South helpfully suggested that I should be accepted as Linda's substitute as SA rep on this occasion and could therefore participate fully in the meeting.

Minutes of the meeting will appear in due course on the MABLAG web site: <http://www.edinburghnp.org.uk/neighbourhood-partnerships/south-central/downloads/workingadvisory-groups/mablag/> (next meeting is scheduled for 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb. at 2.00 pm) so I will only report here on items which seem to be of general interest or of particular interest to SCC. I should add that, not having attended MABLAG since 2013 and not being familiar with the full range of facilities currently provided by the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links, there were several points in the meeting where I felt I lacked adequate background on particulars. Also I was away from Edinburgh for almost all of the Festival period in 2014 and 2015, when the Meadows is used most intensively. I did ask some questions to try to remedy my lack of background knowledge but couldn't always do so to avoid holding up progress on a rather full agenda which had to be concluded by 4.00 pm.

A recurrent problem in the Meadows in recent years has been damage to the grass and soil from repeated use of similar areas every summer during the Festival, particularly by the 'Lady Boys of Bangkok'. There have also been drainage problems, possibly exacerbated by compacting of soil in those areas used most intensively during the Festival. I learned at this meeting that to improve drainage in specific areas liable to waterlogging, narrow slots one metre deep and one metre apart had been cut and filled with sandy loam in the spring of 2013. The experience of the two subsequent winters suggests this has brought a significant improvement. In addition, the 'Lady Boys' in 2015 used a gap site in Fountainbridge. I understand the Meadows was used in 2015 by 'Underbelly' for a circus involving 2 tents; it was claimed at the meeting that less damage ensued than from the 'Lady Boys'. From a

very cursory look across the Meadows from 2 points on the north side this afternoon, I couldn't see any sizable or very visible areas of flooding, despite what has been a remarkably wet winter so far, but it was only a very limited 'site visit'. Various other works have been done or are in hand to improve the condition of the grass and drainage e.g. overseeding, scarification and grass 'retardification' (though I'm not sure what the latter involves).

It may be of interest that there is a proposal to install a memorial bench within M&BL for General Stanisław Maczek (1892-1994), who was commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Corps, an armoured formation which was mainly based in Scotland in World War 2 from 1940 onwards. General Maczek settled in Edinburgh after the war and the plan is to install the bench on South Meadow Walk at the South end of Bruntsfield Links, as this is close to General Maczek's residence in Arden Street. A memorial bench is currently being designed by a Polish artist and is proposed to include a seated statue of the General. In their meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> August MABLAG members unanimously agree that the memorial is suitable for the proposed location and agreed to support the project as presented by Katie Fraser. The project is currently estimated to cost £50K. An update was reported on this project. Further information on the General's contributions to Scotland and the UK can be found via [http://polishscottishheritage.co.uk/?heritage\\_item=hero-amongst-us](http://polishscottishheritage.co.uk/?heritage_item=hero-amongst-us).

A major item on the agenda was the future remit and focus of MABLAG. It seemed to be agreed that the City of Edinburgh Council's Parks Manifesto may not be appropriate as a main focus for the group, as this has a city wide concern and consultation is undertaken widely across the city. However, MABLAG could discuss this manifesto to provide focus for any submission made on it. The general view seemed to be that the Management Plan for M&BL, which was the original focus of MABLAG, was a more appropriate focus. However, there are no immediate plans to take forward the 2010 Management Plan for M&BL, which ran out in 2014, and 'it' (the Meadows or the Plan?) does not currently feature on the South Neighbourhood's Green Flag program. The Meadows failed to win a Green Flag last time these awards were made, though some thought it was debatable whether there really were any tangible benefits of such an award. DD said that a new management plan will be prepared but it will not focus on Green Flag status. It was agreed that local community engagement should be a major concern of MABLAG. An important issue here is that responsible BBQ use in the park needs to be highlighted to new students. It was suggested that a stall is used during fresher's week and manned via CCs and FMBL.

Fallen leaves can make paths slippery after rain. On 31<sup>st</sup> October a voluntary work party organised by FMBL had done a lot of work in sweeping up leaves and planting bulbs at some appropriate points. A voluntary work party of 26 children from Primary 6 in George Heriot's School also did much work in sweeping up leaves and planting crocus and daffodil bulbs on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> November, plus some 'feathering' of trees

(i.e. lopping the lower redundant small branches) on the latter date. Heather Goodare of FMBL very helpfully provided detailed written reports of these 3 voluntary work parties for the MABLAG meeting, so I have appended these below to provide much fuller information.

As regards recycling, green waste from the Meadows now goes for composting and making soil, whereas it formerly went to land fill. Thirty five per cent of the waste (i.e. 'co-mingled waste') in the bins in the M&BL is now recycled with glass being separated out. The 5p we now pay for plastic bags goes to Greenspace Scotland and may amount to £7 million this year. This fund is said to be up for grabs for appropriate 'green' or other environmentally beneficial projects.

A number of other more specific issues were discussed. Regarding the BBQ facilities there seemed to be a number of problems: fire extinguishers had been stolen and were not being replaced; and there were problems with bins for BBQ waste. Signs to indicate areas where BBQs are not allowed have been ordered. There were questions about the maintenance of the pavilion and we were informed this is being scheduled. There was discussion about the café facilities and the need for more information about this. The provision of an outdoor gym in the Meadows is under discussion.

An interesting point which emerged during the meeting was that, although M&BL are owned by CEC, apparently they come under the city's 'Common Good' fund or resource, a general issue which has been raised by Andy Wight, among other things an energetic researcher and campaigner on the issues of land ownership and land reform in Scotland. It's not clear what the implications of this may be.

As a final comment, from my limited experience, I think MABLAG is an interesting committee to serve on. It meets 4 times a year, though occasionally there are special meetings outside that schedule. CC reps and others with the interests of local users of M&BL in mind get real opportunities to raise issues about the condition of the M&BL and their facilities with relevant officials from CEC. My feeling from the meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. was that it had a constructive and quite lively atmosphere and that both sides seemed to feel that progress had been made over the previous two years in addressing some of the recurrent problems in the Meadows, such as drainage and damage to the grass and soil from repeated use of similar areas every summer during the Festival. However, there are clearly many problems still to be tackled effectively.

R.L. Hodgart 10/1/16

## Appendix 1

### FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS AND BRUNTSFIELD LINKS

#### Voluntary work party, 31 October 2015

We had a good turnout this morning: three students from eVOLve (Edinburgh University), a mother with two young sons, and seven of the usual suspects (retired but still going fairly strong): 13 in all. Jimmy Forrest the Ranger was in attendance, and helped particularly by distributing tools and bulbs. These were picked up at the Pavilion hut and packed away at the end at the Croquet Pavilion, which saved a lot of unnecessary carrying at the end of the morning. Many thanks to Jimmy.

Mike Shields had left us bags of bulbs, so we arranged for most of the bulb planting to be done by the two small boys. We concentrated on crocuses. They did this in the six planters at the foot of Marchmont Road, and also in two hollow tree trunks on Leamington Walk. In the meantime Richard and Brian found one of the trees marked for removal of the surrounding wire cage, and did the necessary: this was a hard job, even for two people. In fact they had to hunt around to find the marked trees, and it would be helpful if Mike could give a rough idea of where to find them for next time.

Robin moved a green bin from MMW to the Pavilion: from a place where there were too many green bins to one where there were none. This raises the question of the purpose of green bins: are they in fact meant for recycling? In which case, should they not have the usual recycling notices on the front? This would surely encourage the public to be more responsible. Jimmy thought the green bins were not emptied by the recycling vehicles: but why are they not? Could this not be arranged? Presumably there is nothing to stop them following the same route as the vans that empty the black bins. There are only two silo bins on the whole of the Meadows, and people often don't know about them: but on the whole they do know about green bins. It would help, though, if they were labelled. [Also, the barbecue bins need new notices, and the one at Bruntsfield still needs repair.]

The rest of the gang concentrated on sweeping up leaves around the Pavilion. They were already spread pretty thickly, and we focused on this area as we particularly need to protect the grass in front of the cafe. Unfortunately there was no supply of black bags in the shed, but providentially one of us (Martin) had some in his car, so we used them all to bag the leaves, which are now piled up by the bins for collection and composting. We then gathered for coffee at the Pavilion cafe (thanks to Amanda).

After the break we adjourned to the Croquet Pavilion, where we did a similar job of leaf sweeping and litter picking (this time the children picked the litter). Martin again was able to supply some more transparent bags, and one of the students kindly bought two more packs of black bags from

Scotmid. The resulting piles of bags now await collection for composting from alongside the Croquet Pavilion.

We focused on this area, because experience last year taught us that if leaves are not collected from this corner during the autumn the grass dies. It is a particularly windy corner, where leaves pile up. We have (I hope) saved ourselves a chore later on in that we won't have to replace the grass (as last year), but can concentrate on other jobs. Of course there will be more leaves next month - but at least we have made a start!

Heather Goodare (31.10.15)

## **Appendix 2**

### **Voluntary work party: with 26 P6 children from George Heriot's school**

**3 November 2015**

This was the first of four planned meetings on Tuesday mornings during November. We were blessed with sunny weather after the early morning fog had cleared. We met at 10.00 a.m. at the Meadows Mural, starting with a brief welcome, and introduction to the history of the first mural.

Adults present were: two members of Heriot's staff, two Park rangers (Peter and Rachel) and Heather. This worked out well, with one adult to around five children. We had one group corresponding roughly to each of the five panels of the mural. We concentrated first on leaf sweeping, with one rake per group, the rest using their hands to scoop up piles into the black bags supplied by Peter. Disposable gloves had been provided by Peter. There was considerable competition among the groups to see who could fill the most bags.

The quantity of leaves was massive, and we spent a good hour sweeping them up, before a brief break for snacks. We then carried on with planting bulbs (both daffodils and crocuses) provided by Peter, and according to his instructions, along the foot of the mural. (The ground here is shallow, and we agreed that it would be helpful if Peter could top up the soil when he has a spare moment.)

The children particularly enjoyed the leaf gathering: it was difficult to get them to stop! They went back to it after the bulb planting. We look forward to three more Tuesday mornings in November.

Heather Goodare

4.11.15

## Appendix 3

### Volunteer work party with George Heriot's P6 children: 10.11.15

Although the weather looked distinctly unpromising this morning, after checking with Lonia Mitchell (Outdoor Learning Co-ordinator) at George Heriot's, we decided to go ahead. We met at the Mural, duly kitted out in waterproofs to withstand the persistent drizzle, and divided the children into five groups. Four of them concentrated on raking and bagging leaves in the area near the Mural, while the fifth group went to help Peter the Park Ranger with 'feathering' trees (i.e. lopping the lower redundant small branches). The groups took turns with this task, so that everyone had an opportunity to try tree-logging.

In spite of the potentially hazardous nature of this activity, it went really well. Of course, to set your minds at rest, I carry a first-aid kit, and Peter also has one in his van. Together with Jimmy Forrest, who also helped (mainly with his leaf-blower) we were a party of five adults to 26 children (two staff members from Heriot's, plus two Park Rangers and myself).

The four groups of children who were not tree-feathering attended to leaf-gathering, which they did with enthusiasm, filling about a dozen black bags per group: these will be collected tomorrow. We also did some litter-picking. I heard not a single protest at the task or the weather, though by the end I myself was soaked to the skin, and when I got back home needed a hot bath and a complete change of clothes. I only hope the children managed to get warm and dry back at school.

Many thanks indeed to everyone who helped. We shall hope for better weather next Tuesday. In the meantime Peter will be topping up the soil alongside the Mural, where we planted bulbs last week. He will also provide

wood chips that the children can add at our next work party. These help to deter weeds.

Very sadly, there are new graffiti under the second mural panel. I will alert Scottish Power, who kindly painted out graffiti the last time they appeared, about a year ago. The wall has not been attacked by vandals since then. The cotoneasters are doing well, but will not cover the bottom metre of wall for another year or two (or three).

Heather Goodare

10.11.15