

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2014/15

The period since the last AGM has been notable for a change in the Chairman of the organisation and changes in the composition of the Board, major work in the woods, particularly Grinlow, improved communication with members, a greater presence in the community and a growth in membership.

Staff, Board and Volunteers

I would like to begin by acknowledging the contribution of the staff; they are a dedicated and highly professional team ably led by Alan Walker.

We also benefit greatly from the contribution of our volunteers, particularly from the monthly woodland group.

Paul Dinsdale resigned from the Board at Christmas as he was moving to live in France. He provided exceptional leadership to the organisation and it is a result of this and establishing a sound financial base that we are able to undertake the many developments outlined below. He continues to give assistance with the plans for developments of the visitor centre.

Several board members left after giving many years of service; I would like to acknowledge their varied and important contributions. We were fortunate in replacing them with new members who bring different skills and experience.

I took over as Chairman at Christmas. I would like to thank all the Board for their hard work and commitment to BCA.

Woodlands

We have been very active in Grinlow woods this year carrying out major footpath repairs which have been extremely well received by our visitors. We are very grateful for generous support for this work from Lafarge-Tarmac and Lomas Transport.

We also opened up one of the tracks in Grinlow to form an open ride. This partly grant-aided work, which was done in consultation with Natural England, RSPB, DCC and the Forestry Commission, will help to improve the bio-diversity in the woods especially for birds, invertebrates and wild flowers. Some of the felled wood will be donated to a local wood carver.

There was also additional footpath repair work in Corbar consolidating the route of

the Ring of Trees walk.

We have had events for dog walkers and offer an increased number of woodland experiences for children.

We are cooperating with The Derbyshire Wildlife Trust in a badger TB vaccination programme in Grinlow woods.

We are liaising with consultants to help prepare more detailed 10 year management plans for our woods. We will use these to apply for Grant Aid from the new Countryside Stewardship Fund.

Community, Communications & Membership

One of the main focuses this year has been to raise the profile of BCA in the area. We have done this in many ways including:-

- active participation with other organisations in the town with complementary activities to ours such as Vision Buxton, Buxton Town Team, the Buxton Group, Transition Buxton and Buxton Well Dressing group etc.
- a significantly enhanced coverage in the local press including three well received advertorials
- introducing a new and highly praised and increasingly widely used web site
- active and increasingly used Facebook and Twitter accounts
- giving talks about BCA to a number of local groups including Rotary, the WI, the Farm Life centre and U3A
- financial support for Transition Buxton's Serpentine project and sponsorship of the Spa Prize
- working to restore the Market Place well and restore the Spring Garden colonnades
- installing wood sculptures at Poole's Cavern which have been created by a group directed by High Peak Community Arts working over several months in our schoolroom
- a stall at the May Fair
- membership of the Haddon Hall project consultation group.

Informal contacts have suggested that these efforts are beginning to give us a higher profile in the town.

Members' events have included a well-attended consultation meeting on the proposed Station Road development, a sell-out trip to the House of Commons, wild flower and dawn chorus walks in the woods and a number of talks.

We have a regular e-Newsletter which goes to many of our members and also the three times yearly printed Newsletter which we can now set up and print in house.

In May we had a meeting with members to identify those special places in Buxton which should be preserved, some of which may be under threat.

We are very pleased to report that in the first three months of 2015 we have increased our membership by 10%.

Environment

The main achievement in 2014/5 has been the renewal of our Derbyshire Environmental Quality Mark following a rigorous inspection of all our activities. As probably the largest and most complex organisation to have been awarded an EQM we were complimented on our wide ranging and comprehensive attention to environmental matters.

Education work with children through woodland experiences and with members by talks and guided walks have been expanded this year.

We are helping with the badger vaccination programme, carrying out regular butterfly surveys, assisting with the British Bat Society survey of the bat population in the Cavern and with advanced research on the impact of carbon dioxide levels on stalactite growth.

Planning

We undertook at the last AGM that where appropriate we would consult members on major planning applications. The proposed supermarket development on the Station Road site came into this category. We had a very well attended and successful meeting with members and subsequently submitted the comments to HPBC based on the outcome of the meeting.

The planning group have continued to meet regularly and review applications and submit comments where necessary.

It is hoped that we will in future take a rather more pro-active position on broader planning issues affecting our town in accord with our objects, viz

“to promote the permanent preservation ... of land and buildings of beauty, environmental or historic interest”.

Other Matters

After a huge amount of work by Olive Middleton assisted by Trevor Donald the history of the first 50 years of BCA is in preparation for printing in time for the

anniversary in 2016.

We, in conjunction with the above, have made substantial progress with professional help in getting our archives sorted; this work will be ongoing for some considerable time.

Finances

Much of the above work could not be carried out unless we had a sound financial base. Thankfully we have this as result of far-sighted decisions taken by the Board in the past. Even after spending substantial amounts of money on the woods we ended the year with a satisfactory surplus.

The Future

We will continue with the initiatives outlined above aimed at improving what we offer to members and visitors, increasing our membership, enhancing our profile in the town and pro-actively promoting developments in accord with our objectives and actively marketing Poole's Cavern.

We are also actively looking at expansion of the cafe and shop at the visitor centre to better meet the needs and expectations of our increased number of visitors and also to update the toilets and exhibition area.

We are cautiously optimistic that BCA will be a thriving and vital part of the Buxton scene 50 years from now.

Mike Monaghan May 2015