



## Introduction

Firstly, thank you to all the dedicated volunteers who kept the gardens alive last spring during lockdown, with a regular watering regime. When the Gardeners returned in June, it was lovely to see how many people were utilising the gardens, whether for daily exercise, jogging around in circuits, children playing in the woodland, people sitting chatting enjoying a coffee (socially distancing), reading books and newspapers, sunbathing and picnicking. James even had to returf two areas due to the amount of footfall it had seen. It has been nice to meet residents in the gardens that we do not normally see, and they have revealed that there are parts of the gardens they did not even know existed. It was also evident that there was a network of people looking out for each other, shopping etc with a real sense of community while we were trapped in our bubbles. I made the decision to enhance all the communal areas in 2020 rather than individual gardens to the flats. Areas such as the sundial lawn, the main lawn, the pond, and seating areas have been planted with many spring-flowering bulbs, a newly planted area has been created on the lawn behind Bede and Gonville, and a hedgerow garden near the woodland. Enjoy the gardens whenever you can, we are always adding plants and areas to keep you on your toes. I have included an event which you might like to take part in at the end of January. It might be a great way of meeting other residents and you do not have to go far...it is literally on your doorstep!

## Bulb Planting and Window Boxes

In October 1,800 spring-flowering bulbs were planted around the estate, including tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, anemones, camassias and fritillarias. The colour theme for the window boxes for winter and spring is yellow, orange, and purple; planted up with wallflowers, pansies, and primroses with an additional honey-scented variety of daffodil called '*Bridal Crown*'.



*Mixed Hyacinths*



*Daffodil 'Bridal Crown'*



*Tulip 'Shirley' & 'Queen of the Night'*



## Natural Play Area

The Gardeners have received great feedback from parents regarding the natural play area that we have incorporated sympathetically in the central woodland. Many of the items were constructed by Stuart, who thoroughly enjoyed helping with the design of the project, mostly using reclaimed materials. It was created just in time for last year's lockdown period and kept many children entertained. The area is now complete, incorporating balancing beams, wigwam, willow arch and tunnel, dens, log seating and a mound to climb, which was nicknamed Mound Everest...and the name stuck! In addition, there are insect hotels, bird and bug boxes and laminated nature trail leaflets to follow.



*Balancing Beams*



*Mound Everest*



*Mound Everest Sign*



*Insect and Bird Boxes*



*Bee B&B Insect Hotel*



*Wigwam*



*Willow Arch and Tunnel*



*Den and Seating Area*



*Butterfly House*

## Dahlia Bed and New Arbors

During last May, one of the existing arbors at the end of the rose garden opposite Somerville, blew over and fell apart. Two sturdier wooden arbours were purchased and the damaged arbor was used to strengthen the original, which has now created a new seating area opposite Magdalene House near the *Ginkgo* tree. The new arbors overlook the recently planted Dahlia beds, which include cactus, ball, waterlily, single and pompom varieties, all in pastel shades. So, ignore the garish colours with which Dahlias are associated especially when they were fashionable in the '70s (yes, plants go in and out of fashion too). The two Dahlia beds have



been planted with *Alchemilla mollis* (Lady's Mantle) and *Geranium 'Rozanne'* to create a framework to both planting areas. The result should create a symmetrical border with the existing roses in the centre and the arbors as two bookends to finish the display. Watch for the explosion of colour in summer!



*Pompom Dahlia*



*New Wooden Arbor*



*Cactus Dahlia*

### Hydrangea Glade

Situated at the rear of Bede and Gonville is a popular barbeque and picnic area that historically had been laid out with extremely sparse turf, due to the shade cast from two enormous Eucalyptus trees. The area has now been planted by Zoltan, incorporating various varieties of Hydrangea, including the currently fashionable, *Hydrangea arborescens 'Annabelle'*, that produces huge globes of white flowers. Numerous evergreen shrubs have also been planted including *Camelias* and *Pittosporum* with *Geums* and *Geraniums* for evergreen groundcover. One of the insect hotels has been located at the left-hand side of the Hydrangea Glade, '*Ladybird Lodge*', which is surrounded with white perennial foxgloves. Eurasian jays have been spotted regularly in this location, drinking from the bird bath there.



*Hydrangea Glade*



*Ladybird Lounge*



*Hydrangea Glade*

### Native Hedgerow

Stuart and James have created a newly planted area, named the Hedgerow Garden, opposite Bede House in a location that was originally turfed under tree canopies. This part of the garden proved popular last summer with residents who wanted some quiet time to relax with a book or newspaper. The hedgerow plants will surround the seated area with native flowers and offer a habitat and vital food source to a wide range of birds and insects. It was planted in autumn with native hedgerow plants E.g., Cow Parsley, Red Campion, Betony, Ragged Robin, Yellow Pimpernel and Hedge Bedstraw. Plants were bought in as plugs from a local grower, to reduce costs. A large proportion of the plants have been sown from seed, which Ella and volunteer,



Cathie Sherning, have been propagating and tending in the greenhouse. We have introduced a plant called Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), which as the name suggests, is the main food source of the threatened Tansy Beetle, currently in decline and only seen in areas in Yorkshire and East Anglia. The beetles have a strikingly beautiful, metallic, iridescent colouration. The Tansy plant was first recorded as being cultivated by the ancient Greeks for medicinal purposes. The plant is native to Europe and in medieval times monks used Tansy for digestive problems, fevers, and skin conditions, they also used it in ointments as an insect repellent.



*Tansy Beetle*



*Seed sowing in the greenhouse*



*Tansy flower (*Tanacetum vulgare*)*

### Woodland Planting

One of our committed volunteers, Jane Houston, has been busy this winter, planting natural primroses and yellow polyanthus in drifts along the woodland paths. These plants will be a permanent addition to the gardens, flowering every winter and spring along with the snowdrops that we planted the previous year.



*Primrose 'Clotted Cream' planted along the woodland paths.*

### Pond

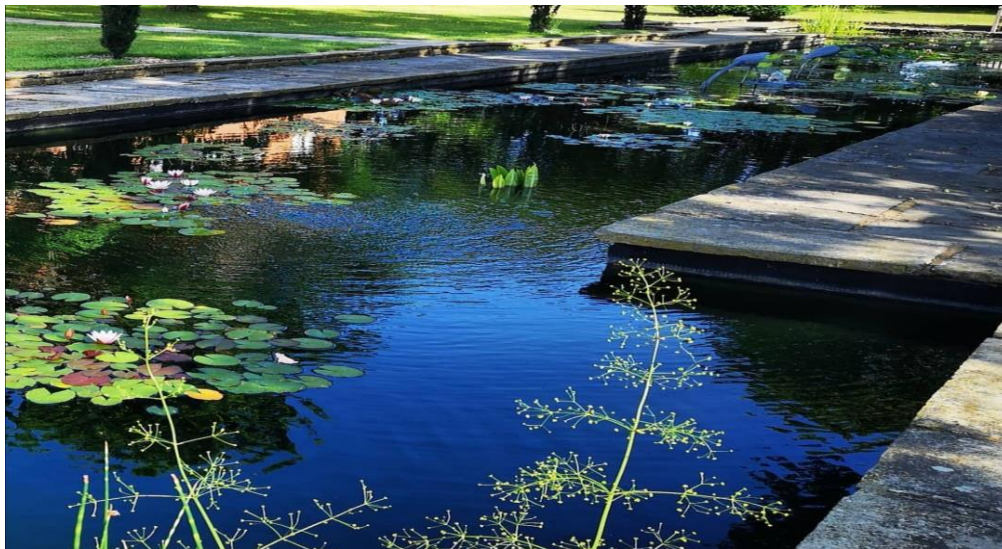
Many of Manor Fields residents have commented on how clear the pond has looked this year. The clarity of the water is all thanks to resident, Chris Holt's dedication and expertise, he is a mine of information when it comes to water ecology and ponds. He visits the pond on a regular basis to test the pH and quality of the water. Except for the dormant winter period, Chris feeds the fish every day; we would be lost without him. He regularly updates the gardens department with weekly pond reports, and I thought it would be a good idea to share some of his comments from the end of September 2020:

*“The ‘top up’ of tap water in the pond has made a welcome cooling to water temperature which is now at 15 degrees C. This approximates to what it should be at this time of the year and it will encourage absorption of oxygen at the surface. The excess nutrients from the town water supply should be consumed by the plants until the pond temperature drops below ten degrees in November.”*

*“The Golden Orfes bought recently are no longer shoaling which suggests that they are feeling more secure in their new home. Their preferred habitat is the middle section of the pond.”*

*“One thing I’ve noticed this Autumn is the large increase in the volume of food being eaten by all the fish. Before Winter, of course, they always stock up well but this year they are especially voracious. According to experts, one should only give fish the amount of food they can consume in twenty minutes and I’ve always abided by this advice. However, over the past two weeks, they have consumed this amount in less than ten minutes. This morning it was gone in six! There was a true ‘feeding frenzy’ with some of the smaller goldfish leaping so high above the surface that I waited in case they left the pond altogether. According to country anglers, when fish are gorging at this rate in Autumn, it means we are in for an especially cold or long winter.”*

*“I decided to check the fish population. I counted between seventy to eighty fish, but this did not include reclusive, shy individuals who are strictly bottom feeders. Coarse fish avoid direct sunlight and are best seen at early morning or late afternoon. They also hide from large birds overhead.”*



*View of the pond in July with the waterlilies just emerging.*

### Tree survey – Catalpa, Lime Tree and Swamp Cypress

Manor Fields Estate Ltd has a duty of care to have regular tree surveys implemented for the following reasons:

- For insurance purposes, regarding people, property, and vehicles.
- To identify the general health of the tree – tree management.
- To detect decay and disease.
- To prevent protected trees from being felled.

Our recent tree survey advised remedial tree-work for some of the trees on the estate in four categories, Priority, One Year, Two Year and Three Year, which is a great start for a Tree Management Plan. Trees can so easily be overlooked, but they give a sense of permanence, increase property value, provide wildlife habitats, lower noise, and dust levels, provide oxygen, and reduce carbon dioxide...to name but a few advantages. Fortunately, no trees are due to be



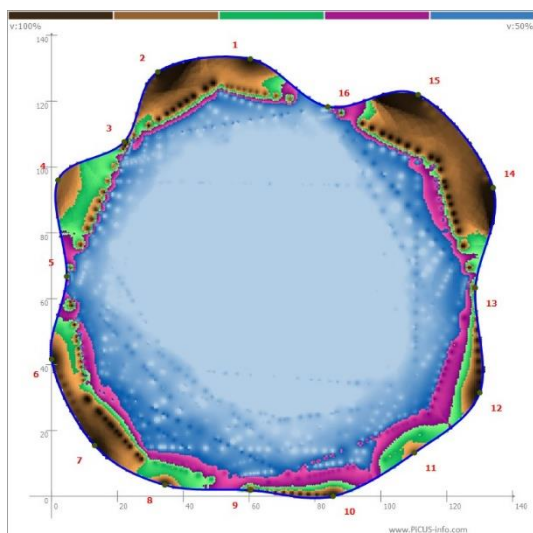
felled within the next three years, however, there were a small number that required further investigation of a sonic tomography test (a bit like an ultrasound scan). Two of the trees came back with some dramatic results, which are not visible when looking at the tree from the outside. The two in question are the *Taxodium distichum* (Swamp Cypress) on the sundial lawn and a *Tilia x europaea* (Lime tree) in the woodland. Below are the graphs from the test with the recommendations for each tree:

### *Taxodium distichum*

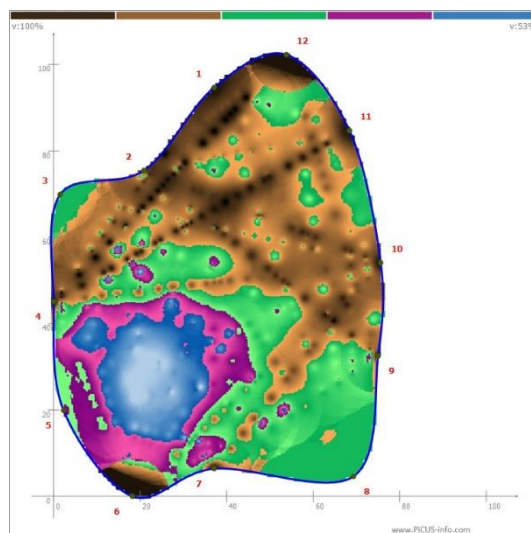
The resulting tomogram (Figure 9) identifies significant reduced sonic velocity, indicated by the green, purple and blue areas. The lighter brown and green areas surrounding the central blue column on the scan image is likely to be indicative of incipient decay. **Conclusion – Reduction of the tree by approximately 50%. A further detailed assessment should be completed within three years to determine the structural integrity of the lower stem and any implications on the trees ongoing management.**

### *Tilia x europaea*

The resulting tomogram (Figure 7) identifies a column of reduced sonic velocity, indicated by the green, purple, and blue areas. The lighter brown areas surrounding the green and the flecked green across the scan image is likely to be indicative of incipient decay. I consider the area of reduced sonic velocity indicated in Figure 7 to be structurally significant and consequently I determine that the tree currently presents an unacceptable risk. **Conclusion – Removal of the tree to a height of approximately 5m and retention of the remaining stem as a pollard habit.”**



*Taxodium distichum* tomography result



*Tilia x europaea* tomography result”

Work is due to be carried out on these trees in February along with other tree canopy reductions due to branches obscuring lighting which are too close to the buildings or encroaching public footpaths on the boundary. All spent branches will be chipped on site by our regular qualified tree surgeons and retained as bark chippings to mulch the borders.

We are also monitoring the *Catalpa* (Indian Bean Tree) on the main lawn. This must be one of my favourite trees on the estate, if not my favourite, because it has great character, shape and the flowers are beautiful. During the last few years, it is evident the tree is in slow decline. Even though *Catalpa* trees are always the last to come into leaf, its leaves are significantly smaller than they should be. Last year it only flowered on the top branches: this variety of tree is usually covered in flowers in summer. It is evident why the tree is in decline, due to its age and numerous large wounds surrounding the main trunk which have formed into cankers; according to the tree consultant they are historic, probably starting from over twenty years ago.





*Catalpa tree on the main lawn last August*



*Large wound on the main trunk and canker on the left*

### A Selection of Wildlife Spotted at Manor Fields



*Juvenile toads using the frog ladder*



*Red Admiral*



*Grey Squirrel*



*Red Robin on the new arbor*



*Feeding time for Frankie the koi carp*



*Lesser Stag Beetle*



*Fox visitor*



*Heron near the pond*



*Bumblebee*



## Big Garden Birdwatch

To quote the RSPB website '*Big Garden Birdwatch is a great way to boost your mood in January*'. This event takes place the weekend of 29<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> January. People are encouraged to go out into their gardens and monitor how many birds they see in one hour - a great idea for everyone during this current lockdown and for families to get their children involved with nature and identifying British birds. Since Birdwatch began in 1979 more than 137 million birds have been counted. The data collected records which birds are on the increase and ones, such as the song thrush, which are in decline. It is so easy to take part:

Simply apply for a form online <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/> or collect a form and identification chart from Reception. Then choose an hour over the weekend to suit you, grab a coffee and select one area of the gardens where you would like to count the birds. Either enter your findings onto the RSPB website or hand your completed forms into Reception and Jo will enter the data collectively for the Manor Fields Estate.



Stay safe!

Best wishes for 2021 from

Jo Morris (Head Gardener) and the Gardens Team

