

**Subject:**

GARDENERS REPORT FOR AGM FEBRUARY 2017

Looking back over the year I have to think about the battering the garden got last winter from the constant wind and rain. While there was no major tree damage which shows that our tree management programme is working well, we did lose some shrubs which didn't have the strength to recover when the winds finally eased. Other shrubs did manage to recover, but not all of them in time to flower this year.

However the summer and autumn was a different story, with lots of sunshine and enough rain to keep the borders flowering well over a long period. In fact, in my opinion I think the garden looked as good this summer as it ever has. The wildflower lawns were in almost constant flower from spring to late autumn. Last winters' new plantings also added to the colour and interest, with the new border in the North Garden growing well and having a big impact there, while the new planting in the woodland also looked good with the foxgloves in particular making a impressive splash.

With the help of a great garden team, we have managed to keep the hedges and lawns cut more regularly with Andy doing a huge amount of work on the hedges, Ben cutting the grass regularly and a great group of volunteers 'The Voles' who help keep the borders looking good by doing a huge amount of weeding and tidying.

On the down side, we did lose two trees to Dutch Elm disease this summer, not in the woodland where I was expecting it, but next to the stockade near the South East gate.

More recently, we have created another new border which came about because we had to remove a huge dying Buddleia Globosa next to the rose bed. I was a bit nervous about cutting it down because it was so big, but the area has now been planted up and I'm excited to see how it grows. I hope it will be a big improvement, because together with the rose bed it creates a big new border that extends all around the south east side of the woodland. In addition to that, it has also opened up the woodland behind to more light. Which means I have been able to plant a lot of mostly British native hedgerow plants to provide nesting sites for birds as well as berries and flowers. That means that if the elm trees and their suckers die off there will already be new sources of food and shelter for wildlife.

Also in the woodland area is the new sculpture. I am of course thrilled and honoured to have one of my sculptures in the garden and very thankful to all the people who made donations towards it. I have planted up the area around it with perennials which I hope will set it off beautifully as they grow up.

On Chichester Terrace I am planning this winter to prune some of the overgrown shrubs and replacing dying ones with new planting. So there will be some gaps for a while until the new plants grow up.

I'm also planning on cutting back some more of the hedges from the railings, around the North Garden.

With the new southern railings in place I am often being asked what my plans are for that area. The short answer is to leave it more or less as it is. Because the hedge is so high there has to be space between it and the railings to put up ladders etc so we will have to keep the strip of grass. However in the long term I would like to even up the hedge a bit, so where the grass is widest I will plant some new hedging and where it is thinnest I will cut the hedge back a bit to create a more even look. On the garden side of the hedge I will cut it back quite drastically in some places. It has grown so wide that at it's widest it is over 8 meters, which makes it very difficult to cut. so in some places it will be cut back to help us maintain it and to stop it hollowing out in the middle.

There are so many variables in a garden that are hard to predict or control like the weather, disease and if the squirrels are going to eat all the tulip bulbs or just some of them! But I am optimistic enough to think that most things will go well and that the garden will continue to go from strength to strength.

Jeremy Mouldsdale