



SAFFRON WALDEN  
TOWN COUNCIL

**Report to the Annual General Meeting  
of the Friends of Bridge End Gardens  
April 2022**



## Background

Bridge End Garden has been managed by Saffron Walden Town Council since 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010 when it took over the management of the gardens from Uttlesford District Council (UDC). Prior to this, an ambitious (partial) restoration project was carried out by UDC between 2003 and 2008; this addressed years of neglect, during which it is fair to say that the Garden was in a hiatus both in terms of marketing focus and its ability to win affection and support from the public beyond its loyal local following.

With new local management and focus in 2010 came the beginning of a sea change in terms of Bridge End Garden's profile both locally and nationally; the Town Council's recognition of the Garden's cultural, historical, social and environmental value, as well as its relatively new management of Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre meant that it was ideally placed to apply enthusiasm and years of relevant marketing expertise to the process of putting it firmly on the UK's map of horticultural excellence.

In 2018, the Town Council commissioned a management report for the gardens and this has informed any work or upgrade over the past few years. Further details of specific works are given later in the report.

## **Covid-19 and Coming out of Lockdown**

Despite lockdowns and restrictions ending more than a year ago, covid is still making an impact on the way we work. We have seen periods of absence from both SWTC staff and volunteers having to self-isolate, which has, at times, slowed us down. That being said, we have quickly settled in to our 'new normal' and the running of Bridge End Garden, as well as SWTC as a whole, is largely as it was pre-pandemic.

Since re-opening, the gardens seem busier than ever. Lockdown seems to have connected more people with nature and encourage exploration of green spaces on our doorsteps and this seems to be continuing on to this day, which is a positive.

## **Advertising and Promotion**

As we slowly emerge from Covid, as facilities, services and events recommence, the Tourist Information Centre staff and BEG staff are working on advertising and promotional opportunities for the forthcoming year. We are cautious of promoting the town and the gardens as safe places to visit but also mindful of striking the right balance and not overwhelming the town with tourists and visitors.

The Town Council is working with John Bagley and other Friends on the signage for the gardens. Consideration is being given to a soft, corporate look with appropriate wording, colours and placement. This work is in the early stages.

The Town Council is also working with the Friends in reviewing online promotion and advertising of the gardens and opportunities are being considered for websites. Again, this work is in the early stages of development and we look forward to working with the Gardens' nominated Working Group in progression of this project.



## Resourcing

Following recent staff changes, Keith Churchward has changed role and is now the Open Spaces and Outside Projects Supervisor and Jason Bonner has taken on the new role of Bridge End Garden and Cemetery Supervisor

The Gardens benefit from two full time employees, both working 37 hours per week; Nathan Doe (Senior Gardener) and Steven Gates (Groundsman Gardener)

They are complemented by:

- The equivalent of 20 hours per week from Town Council volunteers who bring a raft of experience, knowledge and support to the employed team
- The equivalent of an additional, regular 16 hours per week from other paid staff to meet seasonal demands and Supervisory management.
- Additional Town Council staff as and when required, ordinarily for larger projects such as cutting of the maze yew hedge, other hedges and hard landscaping works.
- Temporary, casual hours employees, (Joel Pawson) is engaged for 16 hours per week.
- Contractors as appropriate for tree works and other specific projects
- The support of the Operations Manager and Town Clerk (both investing considerable time in the management and support of staff, volunteers and projects)
- The support of a number of Town Councillors
- Last but absolutely by no means least, the support, dedication of the hard-working team of volunteers of The Friends of Bridge End Gardens.



## Fabric of the Gardens

As always, we continue to look at ways we can improve the gardens, taking in mind ease of access, hard landscaping maintenance and health of our plants. After a large amount of work taking place while the garden was closed to the public, we managed to catch up on many outstanding issues. However, Bridge End Garden is an ongoing project and the work never stops. Some of the things we have achieved in the past year are:

- Added drainage points to path areas.
- Annual tree inspection and remedial works have been completed, including a veteran tree management plan for the *Crataegus crus-galli* in the Wilderness area.
- Considerable amounts of “Toni’s Tonic” have been spread across the beds, and our thanks to the volunteers for helping with this
- There has been lots of new planting and shrubs over the past few month
- Planted in excess 11,000 Bulbs around the gardens, with the help of Friends of Bridge End Gardens.
- The New compost bays have been working a treat and we have already been able to use some of it. The Green Trug/ Yellow Trug system appears to be working well.
- A new beekeeper has been sourced and already has 2 active hives in the Walled Garden, with more planned.
- With the help of the Tourist Information Centre, we are working on collaborating with Saffron Ice Cream Company to create a Rhubarb flavour, with the Rhubarb grown on site.
- The Senior Gardener and Chair of the Friends met with Chris Poole of the European Boxwood and Topiary Society to learn about Box management. We now feel a lot better equipped to manage the threat of Box Tree Moth and blight, as well as the general upkeep and health of our extensive box hedging.
- The Gardens have played host to many community events, including outdoor theatre, treasure hunts, weddings and school trips. This helps generate both funding and publicity.
- New planting has gone in around the gardens, with particular focus on the Walled Garden Centre beds, Long Border, Wilderness and Bridge Street Path.
- Carried out tree works. These include removing a dead Scotts Pine from the maze, removing a Yew from Bridge Street which had become unmanageable, taking deadwood from the reduced Yew around the Dutch Garden viewing platform, hopefully to stimulate re-growth and slight reduction of the tall Yew pillars in the Dutch Garden as they were becoming too tall for the garden staff to manage.
- This is not an exhaustive list of all that has been achieved in the past year.
- Environmentally Friendly Initiatives and Management of Town Council Assets
- It is more important than ever to take the environment into account in all aspects of life and the Bridge End Garden is no exception. Being a Late-Victorian style garden on a remote site, this is not without its challenges. We have large areas of lawn to manicure and plenty of thirsty plants to water.

- Here are some of the ways Saffron Walden Town Council are trying to minimise our environmental impact:
- Composting as much as we can, this saves us buying in compost. Where we do need to buy in, the Senior Gardener is ensuring it is peat free.
- Complimenting Tony's Tonic with leaf mulch produced on site and wood chippings from tree works carried out by SWTC. Mulching helps to trap moisture in the ground, thus greatly reducing the need for watering.
- The continued use of electric power tools. They have proved as good or even better than the petrol alternatives in many aspects and the reduced noise and vibration has had a positive effect on both staff and visitors. SWTC has trialled battery lawnmowers but it was widely agreed that the battery capacity is not yet where it needs to be to manage not only Bridge End Garden but all the grass areas SWTC covers. We hope that the technology does progress.
- While not always appropriate for within the garden, SWTC has planted thousands of native trees and shrubs around the town, including the Anglo-American Playing Fields and Borough Meadow, just outside of Bridge End Garden. This will attract more wildlife to the area as well as absorbing carbon.







**The Town Council's hierarchy of garden waste disposal is:**

- Grass is left and mulched wherever possible (this applies to approximately 90% of all Town Council grass cutting, the exception being BEG)
- Composting
- Shredding (for subsequent composting)
- Removal from site for disposal at large compost area at the Town Council's depot (affectionately known as the "Dungle-Heap")
- Non-compostable, organic matter is shredded and stored for future use on flower beds and is available to allotment holders – these assist with the suppression of weeds, retention of ground moisture and adds nutrient to the soil
- Where no other alternative is available and as a last resort, organic waste may be burnt. The ash is then returned to the soil and/or compost bin to regulate the PH values often caused by too much green waste which can make the compost quite acidic

## Community Use and Private Hiring

We have 6 Wedding receptions Planned for the Walled Garden this Summer as well as one smaller one using the Main Lawn Summer House.

Working with the Senior Gardener and Operations Manager, our Events and Activities Officer has been advertising Bridge End Garden to local primary schools for trips. We have come up with a selection of activities, aimed at connecting children with the natural world around them and educating them on horticultural practices. In addition, local care service, Accuro is going to visit for one evening with a group of youngsters to engage them in gardening and outdoor activities.

We hope to host more outdoor theatre events in the garden this Summer.

## Volunteer Policy

Working with BEG volunteers, the volunteer packs are complete and were in use summer 2019. Now that the packs have been put to use, we certain issues have come to light. With the help of Inger O'Meara of the Friends and SWTC's Health and Safety Officer, we are looking at slimming the pack down as much as possible to ensure volunteers get all the necessary information and risk assessments without being bulked down by paperwork, which can be off-putting to new recruits. Thank you to Inger for her ongoing work with this as well as recording the volunteer hours over the years, this has been invaluable.

It has also been recognised that many of the weekend key holders are not registered volunteers. We think that it is only right for them to have a risk assessment and have them know what to do should anything go wrong. The weekend key holders are highly valuable to keeping the gardens open to all 7 days a week and we owe it to them to keep them safe, involved and appreciated by both SWTC and the Friends of Bridge End Garden.

## Accounts and Budget

Draft Year End Accounts for year ended 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2022	
Total Expenditure	140093.00
Less income from hiring	-3,706
Less Grant	0
<b>Total 2021/22</b>	<b>£136,387.00</b>
Budget for 2022/23	
Expenditure budget	147,461.00
Anticipated income from hiring and grants	-5,500.00
<b>Total Budget 2022/23</b>	<b>£141,961.00</b>