

London's Arcadia Update on the Great South Avenue Restoration project February 2008

Just to keep you up to date on progress of the works on the restoration of the Great South Avenue (Ham Ave) between Sandy Lane and Ham Common (past Grey Court School).

Works are progressing well with the tree pruning which will be completed shortly by The Tree Company. They have done a really good job and while the area looks a bit stark right now with all the elm coppiced, that will soon change. The new trees are being ordered and will be planted in March. We had a chance to inspect a few of the 43 new trees that will be planted in the gaps and they were absolutely stunning +5m tall native European lime trees. I have attached a photo of one of the specimens that we inspected to give you an idea (and the chap standing with the tree is 2m tall).

Preparing the tree planting pits will start in a couple of weeks along with the mound levelling. Unfortunately, whilst the heavy machinery is on site the closure will remain in place for health and safety reason. The Tree Company have opened the path up each night and on weekends so far so you can usually walk/bike/ride a horse along the path early in the morning/late afternoons and weekends but if it is closed, please keep out for your own safety.

Natural England have granted a badger licence for all of the works back in January including the tree planting but there will be some delays near the setts until next autumn as we do not want to disturb the badgers when they are at their most vulnerable in the breeding season. Once we have completed the bulk of the works this spring we will be back to plant a few more trees and sort out details around the sett in the autumn. This will all be under licence with proper inspections and great care. We have noticed that the badgers are really thriving on the newly exposed areas and having a feast on the worms as well as pulling the wood chips into the setts for bedding.

We will be looking to start planting the new hedgerow on both sides of the Avenue in March. We will be gapping up the hedge on the Grey Court School side with volunteers in March. There is a lot of planting to do in a short time frame so it might be that we only get part of it planted this March and some more next autumn. I know that the German School is keen to help out with the planting and we will be in touch with them soon as it is a great project for students. The native mixed hedgerow will be a real treat once it gets going with all the dog roses, dogwood, thorn, sloe, elder, hornbeam, spindle, beech, common native privet, common blackthorn, common pear, hazel, damson, wayfaring tree, whitebeam, field maple, guilder rose, rowan, holly, barberry, wild cherry, bird cherry, crab apple, etc that will be a riot of colour and flowers throughout the year. It will also be a great habitat and an important wildlife corridor for all the other "B's" (as I like to call them) etc. (birds, badgers, bugs, beetles, bees, bats, bfoxes, bhedgehogs...) We will be setting some volunteer planting dates soon so if you have some spare time to help out and you want to offset some of your carbon count (or make a donation and we will plant it for you to offset your carbon count!) please contact Francesca Morrison on 020 8891 7399 or by email at: francesca.morrison@richmond.gov.uk

We will also be putting mistletoe up in the lime trees in March with the able help of BTCV as part of the LBRuT and London Biodiversity Action Plans. Royal Parks have kindly donated some very sticky seeds for these works from Bushy Park. I am told it

takes about 5 years before you will notice if the mistletoe has taken so one will have to have patience! BTCV will also be helping with the hedgerow planting as well and if you wanted to help out with BTCV you can ring Simon Hawkins on 020 8831 6150 or by email on: s.hawkins@btcv.org.uk

Ham Polo Club have made a tremendously contribution towards the improvements to the bridle path and works will start soon by McArdle Equestrian Surfaces Ltd. to improve the track and sort out the continual collapse of the footpath and bridal path divide. The works will likely start next week and it will involve moving some material from Ham Polo Club to Sandy Lane along the Avenues. A big thank you should be given to the Ham Polo Club who had already sold the material onto another Polo Club but allowed the material to stay locally as a very generous gift. Thanks to Joe Mastroianni as well for helping to oversee the improvements to the bridle track and his negotiation skills and Peter McCormack who has offered to help with the Ham Polo Club to harrow the bridle path.

Grey Court School have put up a good section of their new fence which looks great and they will be sorting out the remainder of the fence with a badger licence after 1 July 2008. I understand that they will also be looking at some additional fence details near the tennis courts as well as using some of the old fence as part of a litter control system. The volunteers from Latchmere prison have now nearly removed the entire old fence which will be taken away from site over the coming weeks with some sections salvaged for the aforementioned litter control and plugging gaps on the playing field side etc. A big thank you to the boys from Latchmere who have worked hard at the old fence removal- it wasn't easy! It was very cold! And there was nearly ½ kilometre of fence and posts to remove.

Last but not least thanks to the Ham & Petersham Association and in particular to the Chairman Vanessa Fison for tackling the worst of the litter last weekend that was stuck in the hedgerow by the school. It makes a big difference having the litter removed as when it is there the whole place looks neglected, unloved, and a wasteland which we all know creates an atmosphere prone to antisocial behaviour. It really makes a difference to controlling the litter and a big thank you to everyone that helps out to that end.

If you have any questions my details are all listed below and hopefully we will see a few of you out helping plant the hedgerow and see the new trees coming in soon and please feel free to pass this email onto whomever you feel may find it of interest.

Ken MacKenzie
Feb 08