

Friends Of Willow Park Inc.



Educating and involving the community in protecting, preserving and valuing parklands

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THIRD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 12 NOVEMBER 2009

Last night I listened to an interview with David Attenborough, the world renowned field naturalist. He was pointing out how much people are now disconnected from the natural world. Studies have shown that disconnection from nature is likely to have detrimental effects on people's health and wellbeing. Often, parks are the major connection people have with nature and research has shown that 'green nature' such as parks can help reduce crime, foster psychological wellbeing, reduce stress, boost immunity, enhance productivity, and promote healing (Maller et al 2002). Urban parks are needed to help provide this vital link to nature, for the wellbeing of people as well as the health of flora and fauna.

A very strong message to come out of the recent Community Conversations was the need for our city to protect and enhance the natural aspects of Willow Park. While people recognise the important role Willow Park plays as a venue for sport and leisure, overwhelmingly, it is the connection to nature that people do not want to lose.

As we embarked on the Master Plan journey we experienced some anxious moments: What if the community did not value the park in the same way that we do? What if they wanted it fundamentally changed? The results of the Community Conversations were very heartening. They validated the efforts and hard work by the many people who have given so much of their volunteer time to protecting, preserving and valuing our beautiful parkland.

The Community Conversations was a great success. Not only did it (thankfully) confirm what we all believed to be true, it was also successful because of two other key things. One, through the Community Conversations, large numbers of people in our community were involved in having a say. Two, it demonstrated what can be achieved when council is willing to take a risk to work in partnership with its community. I would like to thank the many people who helped make the Community Conversations such a huge success. It involved an enormous amount of time to plan it, organise it, run it, and then analyse the data. It was a wonderful joint effort from Friends of Willow Park and the City of Wodonga – thanks to everyone!

The Community Conversations was an important early step in the Master Planning process. We now eagerly look forward to 2010 for the next stage in which the concept plans will be developed and priorities set. We must remain focused not only on the final plan but the journey along the way, which will, hopefully, continue to be a shared journey between the council and the community.

This third year has seen us establish ourselves financially through the successful sourcing of a number of grants. This has allowed us to build up needed equipment for our Waterwatch and Community Gardening so that, mostly, we are now self-sufficient in regard to these activities. Importantly, the grants have enabled us to continue to employ a part time coordinator. Being able to do this makes such a huge difference to a small community group like ours. It helps to progress our goals in a way that would not be possible if we were reliant solely on volunteer hours.

Patrons: Professor David Mitchell, Professor Allan Curtis, Dr Juliet Bird

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Kieran Bennett was a hard working coordinator for us for much of this past year. Kieran brought to the role a wonderful ability to network, link to the media, write policy papers and submissions, and to bring us further into the virtual world. It was with some reluctance that the committee accepted Kieran's resignation. I would like to publicly thank Kieran for his efforts and wish him well for the future.

Alison Mitchell took over the coordinator's role last month. Ali will not need any introduction to you. She has been one of our hardest working members since the group's inception. Her energy, ideas and commitment are wonderful assets, and even more so now in her new role.

You will see from Ali's report that we have had yet another busy year on the projects front. In addition to these, we participated again in Paws in the Park and showcased our activities at Lounging on High. This latter event was well received by the hundreds of children who joined in the fun at the 'bug pond' and planted up a tree to take home.

An important activity for us during the year was our strategic planning evening. This has set some great directions for us for the coming years – and in typical style is very ambitious. This plan plus the data from our Community Conversations have given us a sound base upon which to mount cases for funding.

A key piece of new work for us is the Biodiversity by Design project, funded through the Second Generation Landcare program. The project will allow us to develop a landscape design for the Pearce Street entrance of Willow Park. This design will focus on increasing plant biodiversity, which in turn will promote a more diverse habitat for fauna. It will also give the council concept plans for turning this rather ugly spot into an aesthetically and enticing entrance. We have invited the City of Wodonga and Wodonga TAFE to partner with us to implement this project. This is an important first project in implementing the Master Plan for Willow Park.

This year has seen us welcome another member to our family – Friends of Belvoir Park/Sumsion Gardens. I have been inspired by their energy and commitment and I wish them well as they settle into their role. Together, we look forward to advocating for our two great parks and to promote the important corridor (for people and nature) that links the two parks.

Your committee has worked tirelessly again to progress the objectives of the group and I thank them for this work. Two committee members, Jenny Sutter and Wilma Krottje retired early from their positions due to family reasons. We were sorry to lose them as their input was invaluable but they remain active within the group in other ways.

Many people (from both inside and outside of our group) have volunteered their time or given other sorts of support to ensure that our many activities have been successful. Too many to name personally, I would like each of you to whom I refer to please accept this as my heartfelt appreciation for your efforts.

In closing, I remind you of the research findings about the health benefits of parks, particularly those that promote interaction with nature. Remain connected with our 'green nature', Willow Park and in doing so reap the benefits of improved health and wellbeing. Remember, Parks for Life!

Julie Hind, President, Friends of Willow Park
12 November 2009



Having fun at Lounging on High

Reference

Maller, C., Townsend, M., Brown, P., St Leger, L., (2002), *Healthy Parks, Healthy People: The Health Benefits of Contact with Nature in a Park Context – A Review of Current Literature*, Deakin University and Parks Victoria,