



Friends of Willow Park Inc.

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

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE 5TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 3 NOVEMBER 2011

A little under a year ago we were looking in amazement at the floods in Willow Park, which had essentially turned the open green spaces into a huge lake. By the time the waters receded after the fourth, and largest of the flooding events, we were met with much destruction and the loss of around 75% of the plants that we had so lovingly planted in the previous three to four years. A year on and we have been able to plant a large number of new trees and shrubs – the beginnings of the re-greening of the area. Hopefully they will enjoy a number of years in which to establish before the next major flood, thereby enabling them to withstand its force.

The floods and the previous ten years of drought have reminded us of the wonderful resilience of the park and House Creek and their often ephemeral nature. I have been enjoying viewing the creek from many new vantage points that have opened up as a result of the flood. My husband, John, and the grandchildren have enjoyed discovering new sandy beaches and entries to the water's edge. We will enjoy these new aspects whilst we can, knowing that these will not be permanent as nature's forces continue to shape and re-shape the landscape.

Hopefully some of the changes might be more permanent, aided by the environmental works that we have and will continue to do. I have welcomed the greater diversity of bird life along the creek and in the park, especially the now more often sighted azure kingfisher. Equally heartening is the strengthening of the social bonds that continues to occur as part of our wonderful group and the wonderful work it does – and for this I would like to dedicate this year as a "year of celebration".

First and foremost amongst our celebrations is the signing of the 25 year Master Plan for the park by Council. This was almost five years in the making. In collaboration with Council, Friends of Willow Park gave in excess of 500 volunteer hours to the process, including: participation in regular master plan steering committee meetings; scoping, planning, designing, and implementing a community-led community engagement process; a document review of relevant other plans; analysis of data; and writing a report that was used to inform the drafting of the master plan. This plan will now guide the work of Council and Friends of Willow Park. We use it to support grant applications, with the view that we will, over time, implement the plan in collaboration with Council.

The second milestone to celebrate is the reaching of our fifth year. Establishing and retaining a vibrant and effective community group is no mean feat. It takes a lot of joint leadership, energy and commitment by many people. In recognition, Landcare awarded two members of the committee – Alison Mitchell and Julie Hind – Five-Year Landcare Awards. We accepted these awards with honour and on behalf of the many people who have contributed to making Friends of Willow Park such a success. At that award ceremony, the Landcare representative spoke of the quiet achiever, the unsung hero of groups who works tirelessly behind the scene. It is often the upfront workers such as Ali and me who are formally recognised whilst the quiet achiever just gets on with supporting the group. Tonight, I would like to begin what I hope will become a standing order of our AGM – the 'Friends of Willow Park Quiet Achiever Award'.

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

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As part of the general business of this meeting I would like to present the inaugural awards based on the following criteria:

- Longstanding commitment to, and active participation in, supporting the work of Friends of Willow Park
- The giving of extensive number of volunteer hours to the group's activities
- Inspiring and supporting others to be involved.

Following the presentation I will open up for discussion the possibility of making this award a regular feature of the AGM with members nominating people for consideration by a specially-formed sub-committee.

A third item of celebration I would like to bring to your attention tonight is that of Friends of Willow Park being shortlisted for two statewide Landcare awards: the Toshiba Community Group Award; and the Urban Landcare Award. These awards recognise excellent work in such things as: the repair of damaged environments and improving long-term environmental outcomes in an urban setting; working collaboratively with others in the community; and sharing skills, knowledge, ideas and outcomes with the broader community. The winners of these awards are to be announced at Government House in Melbourne on 16 November. Alison Mitchell and I have been invited to represent Friends of Willow Park. We hope that we will bring home to the group the winning award – but even if our group is not the ultimate winner, being shortlisted is truly an honour of which we should all proud. Well done to everyone!!

The final celebration relates to the expanding interest in natural resource management issues in urban settings that our group has helped to foster over the past five years. Our membership has grown to over 100 people. In addition, we auspice Friends of Belvoir Park and are currently supporting the establishment of a number of stewardship groups along House and Huon Creeks, as part of the Biolinks project. The Gardens for Wildlife Project has established an extensive database of people interested in understanding and practising biodiversity in their own gardens thereby adding to the improvement of the overall urban landscape.

These trends have highlighted to the committee a need to initiate the development of an urban Landcare network that can encompass and support all interested groups. Such a network would help the many groups work together, provide the smaller groups with important governance support, open up broader funding opportunities, and provide the means of cohesively linking the various environment activities. Our committee, along with Baranduda Landcare Group and Parklands Albury Wodonga, will begin to help establish this network in 2012. This will not mean any substantial change to Friends of Willow Park. We will remain in our same shape and form, and continue to undertake the many environmental and social activities that we all enjoy. The difference will be in having around us a network of like-minded groups who are also focused on improving the natural environment within their local area. What a difference a collective of such groups could make to the landscape within the municipality of Wodonga!

In closing this report I would like to thank the many people who have contributed to the success of our group. Firstly, thanks to our funding bodies: the Victoria Government through Second Generation Landcare; the Commonwealth Government through Caring for Our Country; and the City of Wodonga through Neighbourhood Power. Without such funding we could not achieve the great on-ground outcomes. Secondly, thanks to organisations such as NECMA, Parklands Albury Wodonga, City of Wodonga, and other environment groups who have provided general support, advice, and specialist assistance.

Finally, thanks to all those who have: helped coordinate projects; planted, weeded and mulched; looked after our equipment; provided refreshments; arranged social events; input to, and distributed our newsletter; updated our website and facebook; prepared funding submissions; looked after the nest boxes; helped at events; participated in planning meetings; kept our finances up-to-date; supported staff; and participated in committee meetings. All of this embodies our motto: "Parks for Life!"

Julie Hind
3 November 2011



Willow Park in flood – December 2010



Flood-damaged nest box – December 2010