

Friends of the Rocheid Path

Convenor's Report Spring 2013

Good progress to report on a number of fronts but still plenty to do.

Arboretum Bank

The Council took on board our suggestions for tidying up the overgrown shrubs and the damage to trees along the Arboretum Bank and in December 2012 their maintenance contractor pruned the damaged tree limbs, removed all the old tree stumps and some of the overcrowded shrubs and pruned those remaining. A new oak sapling has been planted by the Council at the Falshaw Bridge end of the space.

After discussion with the landscape consultant on the Lagan works (Smeeden Foreman) we are also expecting that their reinstatement work will include new plantings of beech and hornbeam saplings between the existing established trees which will eventually restore a line of deciduous trees along the entire length of the outer (pavement) edge of the space.

Arboretum Triangle

FORP provided some proposals for the reinstatement of the triangle which were sent to residents of Reid Terrace for their views. There was no negative reaction and these proposals were therefore sent to Smeeden Foreman. SF have now produced a revised scheme for the triangle which meets many of our requests. The privet hedge along the outer pavement edge will be reinstated with new trees planted to fill some of the spaces – two limes and a hornbeam. Access to the triangle area will be left open from the path and the triangle will be replanted with three small flowering fruit trees – crab apple; medlar and cherry plum under-planted with grass and spring bulbs.

There is less sign of progress with our proposals for modifying the railings and it seems that at least initially the railings along the riverbank will be re-instated as they were prior to the flood works.

West end of Path

I approached Scottish Power to ask them to remove the old and dilapidated railings around the sub-station which they have now done. This gives the area a much more open appearance and will also make it possible to remove the large tree stump and some of the overgrown holly and shrubs. SP are also happy to cooperate on a scheme for re-planting the area around the sub-station once it is cleared.

Work by the volunteer group has started to make some significant improvements to the appearance of the holly trees, removing poplar starts from the area above the river and cutting ivy which was choking many of the mature trees.

Bell's Bridge Area

The work on the new bridge has left quite a few problems to be tackled on the Rocheid Path side of the bridge. I have been discussing with Council officials and the landscape consultant the need for some substantial restoration of this area. It is not yet clear how much it will be possible to achieve

under the Lagan contract. However their current landscaping proposals do include planting of two new beech saplings re-soiling and re-seeding the areas to either side of the new path.

East end of Path

Apart from the good work of the volunteers in clearing ivy from the mature trees (which was an especially challenging undertaking on the big willow next to the Tanfield Bridge) there is so far little real progress to report in this area.

However plans are now well advanced for installation of an information board on the path opposite the Tanfield Bridge. This will include some historical information and illustrations as well as a map and should give a good sense of the Rocheid Path as a special place.

Volunteer Force

Thanks to Josie Inwood for her excellent efforts in organising several weekend sessions over the past two months. A number of enthusiastic and energetic volunteers have been enjoying themselves while making a positive difference to the appearance of the path. We have kept up a regular dialogue with Council officials to agree the priority tasks for the volunteers and to obtain their guidance.

Next Steps

Gus Schwarz has been discussing with some other residents in Inverleith Terrace ways of mobilising some additional resources to help with some of the larger and more technically challenging clearance tasks on the banks above the Path.

As mentioned above I am in continuing contact with Council officers about reinstatement work by the flood works contractor especially in relation to getting a proper scheme for restoring the area around the new Bell's Bridge.

The Council expect to be able to commit some funds to work on the Path in the next Financial Year sufficient to enable them to tackle some more tree surgery (including for example removal of the damaged willow limb at Tanfield); replacement of the missing sections of railing at the West (Arboretum Avenue) entrance; and removal of the dilapidated railings along the riverside in the Dell. They are keen to keep in touch with us about overall priorities.

Apart from the proposal for the new information board at the Tanfield Bridge there has been no progress on our proposals for improving the directional signs along the path. We will also need to keep up pressure for some action on this.

Ian Hooper

8 March 2013