

## The Arbour, Farnhill

Having lived 10 years at Arbour House it was very interesting to visit the Arbour over 20 years later and see how it had changed and listen to what the parish council want to achieve. In many ways the area was very much the same, the back gardens of the houses on the main street have encroached a little and there was much better access to and across the area but other than that the flora was very similar.

The parish council would like to see the Arbour as an area that attracts wildlife, looks attractive but does not need a lot of maintenance, whilst I know some residents believe that the area should be left alone as it already attracts some wildlife and they are worried that meddling with it may alter this.

Having talked to people from both sides I would say that they both have good points to make but there is a way to cater for all sides and increase the benefits to the flora and fauna of the area. To do this I would suggest the following:

Firstly we need to look at what will attract more wildlife and that is simple: a better and more diverse habitat with more food with less danger and predation. If we look at food many will think of berries, fruit and nuts but if I was to say that the oak tree is the best attractor of wildlife and it doesn't provide any of those 3 things then you may wonder why? The answer is that an old oak provides, apart from acorns in the autumn, a good habitat for many animals including insects etc, these in turn provide a year round source of food for other insects and birds which in turn provide food for other animals and so on.

There is rightly a lot of concern about bees at the moment and whilst they will love the patches of heather, the clump of ivy, and the blossom from the trees there is more that could be done with regard to both food and nesting habitat. These benefits would also help other insects, which in turn helps the entire flora/fauna balance.

With this in mind I would encourage using the following trees and shrubs:

Oak – Excellent host for all sorts of wildlife (one on site) grows large so beware

Hawthorn – Excellent host for insects with abundant flowers and berries that tend to hang on a bit longer. (a few on site). Will take some shade

Blackthorn – Very early blossom, insect habitat and autumn fruit. Best in Sun

Hazel, Catkins in winter, insect host, nuts in autumn. Will take some shade but more catkins in a sunnier spot.

Guelder Rose – Not a rose at all but good flowers in late spring and red berries in early autumn best with some sun.

Birch – Good insect host (A few on site). Light airy tree that doesn't smother other plants.

Alder – Worth trying for its insect habitat. Golden variety attractive and worth trying

Crab Apple – Spring blossom and fruit that stays on the trees or on the ground well into winter. Needs sun for fruit.

Bird Cherry – Spring blossom, summer fruit. Best in sun.

Rowan – Flowers, fruit and some insect habitat (Some on site). Best with some sun

Dog Rose – Flowers and hips. Needs sun to do well

Elder – Flowers berries and insect host (Some around edges). Will grow in deep shade but flowers and fruits best with sun.

Holly – Evergreen and berries, Shade or sun.

There are on site some Whitebeam, Norway Maple and Sycamore, these are not trees that I would ever suggest for wildlife, with the last two being susceptible to blocking out other plants and therefore detrimental to your ideas. (They aren't even particularly attractive trees, especially the sycamore, or ones with the best autumnal colourings) I would strongly suggest looking at a plan to remove these, or at least the sycamores and maples over the next few years before they get large and replace them with something more suitable and less harmful to the area. I can offer further help here if required.

To make the site more attractive there are ornamental varieties of the above list that have coloured foliage or colourful flowers and fruit without losing their environmental benefits but still fit in with the native stock. Amongst these are gold and purple forms of hazel and elder, the latter having pink flowers, Red and Crimson flowered forms of Hawthorn, yellow berried Guelder rose and variegated Hollies. There are also many roses with brighter coloured flowers and hips such as *Rosa rugosa* that fit well and *Rosa Glauca* with blue flushed leaves pink flowers and purple hips.

I would suggest looking at the Arbour as 3 distinct areas. The first the 8m wide strip down the hill alongside the gable end of Hillbrow, The second the grassy area in the middle and the third section the part behind Arbour House and north slightly where there are larger trees and more shade. I have also looked at a narrow strip all along under the wall at the top. These sections have their own distinct characteristics that should be maintained and enhanced to generate as much interest as possible from this site.

The Hillbrow part is very sunny with drier ground. Now that the willowherb/fireweed has been reduced this would make a good area for sun loving shrubs with the odd suitable tree in amongst. On the outside edge of this area I would plant a few more colourful shrubs to brighten an otherwise green canopy and provide more colourful flowers and fruit. I personally think many garden based plants would look wrong here as their characteristics are out of keeping with the native plants but there are plenty of shrubs that are based on our native varieties or very similar that have much more colourful characteristics and I would use these.

Behind Arbour House is shadier because of the trees and here we have a thick underplanting of brambles to contend with. By cutting them right back you have created a section where new plants could get established before they are swamped by the surrounding vegetation, especially if that was cut back for a year or two. Here we can plant shrubs that will take some shade with one or two other 'light' trees added to provide more habitat but not too much shade. Leave the large clump of ivy as this is an excellent provider of nectar for insects and bees late in the year.

In the middle I would encourage you to do very little other than stop the sides encroaching in on it and make sure no unwanted plants get established. The heather/ling is a good plant for bees and the tussocky grass provides a totally different habitat on site. All I would suggest is that more wildflowers could be added but not at the expense of the heather.

Across the top of the middle area and towards Arbour House I would plant a belt of native shrubs in from the wall so it doesn't cause any damage and also it will be lower here and therefore not block the views from the above properties. I would use a full range of shrubs and plant it in such a way as to have higher and lower areas and even a few gaps to give a totally natural feel rather than an untidy hedge.

To add another level of interest I would suggest planting more wild flowers within the new and existing canopy of plants. There are already some large areas of willow herb but these have little environmental benefit although they are the food source of the Fuchsia Hawk moth, a spectacular caterpillar and brightly coloured moth that used to live in Farnhill when we were there.

To involve the local community, how about getting some to grow these wildflowers from seed to a size where they can be planted out with a good chance of success. Planting seeds straight into situ on a site like this has a very high failure rate as the new seedlings simply cannot compete with the established plants.

To further enhance the area and indeed the village if some way could be found to connect the Arbour with the wooded areas alongside Silsden Road then this would act as a corridor to bring animals and birds into this area. This need only be some considered planting alongside the footpath or one or two suitable small trees and shrubs to provide cover between these areas and provide a feeling of security to things as they move around the area.

Finally, and contentiously, I remember that when I lived in Farnhill the Arbour was plagued by cats that decimated most of the birds and no doubt mice etc. If you could avoid this then the site would benefit enormously.

#### Future Maintenance

To a large extent all three areas could be left to their own devices but to get the best from things I would suggest some management.

The area behind Arbour house is very steep and difficult to manage. A couple of simple paths running across and slightly up the slope would help with access and could be made to act as a run off path for excess water to avoid it landing in the house by Arbour House's drive. The undergrowth should be cut back until the new planting is large enough to compete and thereafter on an occasional basis to stop it taking over. At the end of the day this area is not suitable for public access and keeping the public off would stop accidents.

The Hillbrow end could do with a strim between plants until they get established but the shrubs must not be touched or they could die. Once established, the southern edge should be kept under control to stop it taking over and spreading into the middle. Occasionally some of the shrubs could be pruned for size or to encourage new growth and flowers

In the middle the grass nearest the bottom and along the pathways can be kept low but the rest should be left to grow taller as this provides excellent food and habitat for mammals and seed feeding birds. The heather might need a trim to stop it going woody and any unwanted or unsuitable plants removed to keep this area different.

All the new planting would establish much quicker if they were kept weed free but that is asking an awful lot so to compensate I would suggest feeding the new plants until they are established. This would involve spreading a handful of fish blood and bone around each plant in late February or early March and again in June for the first 2 or 3 years.

I would be more than happy to advise further and help with positioning plants but sadly I am unable to do any physical work due to ill health.