

## The Arbour, Farnhill

Having lived at Arbour House until 1993 I was very interested to come and look at the Arbour, see how it has changed and look at how it may be improved.

In many ways it was just the same; the back gardens of some houses may have encroached a bit and access is much better but generally it was still an area to attract wildlife albeit a bit tatty around the edges, with some good areas and some that could be improved to the benefit of all.

I know that part of the village would like to see it spruced up a bit whilst others are worried it might lose its charm and attraction to wildlife. In reality I think both sides can be catered for; with careful planning, planting and management the Arbour could offer a home to a much larger diversity of flora and fauna whilst offering a less scruffy appearance to those living by it.

To understand my ideas I have split the Arbour into 3 areas:

- to the North an 8m wide strip running up past the gable end of Hillbrow where a swathe of willowherb has been growing. This area is predominately very sunny with drier ground.
- to the South the area of trees and brambles behind Arbour House and towards the middle, this is mainly shaded by trees with some sunny parts in between and nearer the top, damper ground due to shade.
- finally the area of grass and heather in between the other two that is very open and sunny.

Looking at the north end first I would suggest removing or greatly reducing the area of willowherb and replanting with native shrubs and an occasional tree to create a much better food source and habitat over a much longer period of the year. Plants to include: hawthorn, hazel, blackthorn, guelder rose, dog rose and holly. To enhance the colour of this area some ornamental varieties of those plants could be used to provide different foliage colours and brighter coloured flowers and fruit whilst still be in keeping with their native siblings.

To the South I would cut the brambles back a bit more but leave the clump of Ivy alone (excellent for insects and bees). This cleared area would now allow the planting of some shrubs and trees to enhance the habitat and food supply. Hopefully these new plants will get established before the brambles return to provide a two-tier habitat. As this area is so steep I would suggest leaving it to its own devices with maybe some cutting back of the undergrowth as required on an occasional basis. A couple of simple diagonal paths across the slope would help here.

In the middle we have a completely different habitat that attracts a very different fauna that is a valuable asset to the site. I would do very little here other than make sure the scrubby grass and blocks of heather do not become encroached on from the sides or diluted by unwanted seedlings and plants.

Along the top of the whole site and just in from the wall I would plant a screen of mixed native shrubs and trees to further attract birds etc in.

Throughout the whole area I would encourage a long term project to increase the number and diversity of the wildflowers already growing there and would suggest a community effort to grow suitable varieties from seed until big enough to plant out. (Scattering seed over a wild area has a very low success rate and is not worth the effort.) Plants to consider here are primroses and cowslips, the first in part shade the latter in sun, foxgloves, harebells, cranesbill, self-heal, speedwells, etc.

The overall effect would be to have a taller growing area to the north with extra interest through coloured foliage and brighter flowers and fruit. A low dry central area enhanced with some wild flowers and in the southern end trees with shrubs providing a shadier but no less interesting area.

All planting should be done with consideration to the views and light of surrounding properties.