

## ELFORD HALL GARDEN PROJECT - Annual Report 2019

This year, the project celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> year. The walled garden and its surrounds are administered by Birmingham Corporation who are the trustees of the Elford Estate and, as such, the land is private. They lease the property to the Elford Hall Garden Project (EHGP) and devolve the running of the property to the trustees of the Elford Hall Garden Project and the volunteers. From its inception, the EHGP trustees wanted to develop the walled garden as a community garden, free to all visitors.

I can report that 2018/2019 was a successful year when many visitors came to the garden throughout the year and to special events put on by the volunteers and private users for weddings, parties and meetings. A number of on-site guided tours were arranged for visiting groups and off-site evening presentations were given to a number of societies. In July, we were judged by the Royal Horticultural Society as 'Level Five - Outstanding' - our 5<sup>th</sup> successive year at this level of award. We were pleased to be able to host the twinning with Awoingt and the annual presentation meeting of the UK Austin Healey Car Club amongst other things. The garden continues to develop in many areas and is well used and appreciated by visitors from in and out of the village. Sunday visits by Tarte au Citroen were a success and will be continuing this year. The ample apple harvest in 2018 has been made into cider for the first time and this will be available for tasting shortly. Nearly 100 people attended the defibrillator training sessions organised by EHGP and held in the village hall.

The problem reported last year with visitors not taking responsibility for dog mess on the site has diminished and we thank the Parish Council for their help in tackling this problem.

With considerable regret, the trustees have decided not to proceed with a beer festival this year. This has been a most successful event over the years, well supported with valuable help from villagers on the weekend of the festival, but putting the event together has become increasingly hard for our small and aging volunteer force. It takes some 4 weeks to put the event together and 2 weeks to put it to bed and there is so much other work needing to be done around the garden at the same time that it was putting volunteers under a lot of pressure. Hopefully, it will return as an event in the future under the guidance of younger members of the community. Consider this an invitation!

This brings me to my final points. First, the project needs an influx of new younger volunteers if its future is to be guaranteed. The majority of current volunteers are in their seventies and I know from experience that our capacity to undertake the work that is necessary to keep the gardens looking cared for diminishes with the passing years. One of our priorities for this year is to try to persuade more younger villagers to get involved - even if it is only for an hour occasionally. It's a simple case of "many hands making light work". We volunteer on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday but there is no reason why help can't be offered on the other days too! No skills are required - just a willingness to make a contribution towards YOUR community garden.

Second, we will be trying to persuade more villagers to become 'Friends of the Walled Garden'. There are quite a few villagers who regularly use the walled garden for various activities but who make no contribution at all to the upkeep of the garden or to the welfare of the project. It would be nice to welcome these people as 'Friends' or better still, as volunteers. Your Walled Garden needs **you!**

Roger Thompson  
Trustee