

## Report from FOGG to 2024 VGS AGM

Put together by members of the FOGG steering group:

'We now have eleven volunteers on our panel, and on any given Thursday, weather permitting, anything from one to maybe five to six will enthusiastically turn up, have a chat, and, yes, get some work done. We are lucky to have John H and now Geoff in the group, both living nearby, which means that they can water throughout the week if necessary. With the number of shaded areas and raised beds and new plants, this is vital during dry spells. Katie, who joined as very early on, and is an enthusiastic, hardworking and knowledgeable member of the gang, is poorly at the moment, and we miss her. We look forward to welcoming her back as soon as she is able.

We have probably saved EDDC £8k to £10k over the year in terms of labour, and are excellent ambassadors for the facility, chatting with locals and visitors alike. Our efforts are much appreciated, particularly by those who remember how neglected the area had become. EDDC cut the grass infrequently, deal with trees that are beyond our expertise (if nagged), do a bit of leaf blowing, take away our green rubbish, and carry our repairs to handrails if prodded. To be honest, not much else. We have progressed from major clearance, to tending and shaping and planting. We have even been given plants by the public - a nice gesture of support. We are still opening up some areas, by removing bay and laurel, to sunlight and rain, and we are frequently surprised by how much dormant vegetation germinates (not just weeds, but prized plants) at ground level as soon as light and water is available.

We could do so much more. For example, if we were given a dumpy bag of stone, we could fill in some ponding areas along the path, and also repair some access issues. So far, no luck. We have a scheme, now two years old, to enhance access throughout the park to ambulant challenged visitors. So far, EDDC are showing little enthusiasm in taking this forward, even though we have at least one offer of financial support.

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And so, the Friends of Glen Goyle have been somewhat busy – and that has included welcoming visitors and collaborating with other like-minded groups, as well as sorting 'street furniture' and successfully applying for (very generous) funding.

The various groups and organisations who have visited the Glen over the summer seemed to like what they were shown.

First were the prestigious Sampson Society in late June, whose founder Sylvia Brownlee worked with FOGG to put together a programme, starting with 30 members of the Society and ten from FOGG at the 'upper' Glen, owned by EDDC and managed by FOGG, and ending up in the grounds of the 'lower' Glen which runs through the grounds of the Belmont Hotel. The two groups had a lovely time together discussing the history of Glen Goyle and the nearby buildings created by Sampson – with more here on the Sampson Society's visit to Glen Goyle.

Then in mid July the Goyle was paid a visit by the judges of Britain in Bloom, with the FOGG project once again being entered for an 'In Your Neighbourhood' award, as well as this year for the RHS 'Parks and Gardens' category.

And there was fabulous news from FOGG steering group and working party member John McGregor who picked a certificate up at the Sidmouth in Bloom Awards Ceremony. As John said, "There is also a glowing report from the judge/assessor, with feedback concerning areas for development. There was also a Pride in Parks award relating to Glen Goyle for EDDC. So a very satisfactory evening and congratulations are due to everyone involved."

On the same morning as the RHS tour, the Glen appreciated a visit from Katie Wilkinson, Wilder Communities Team Leader at the Devon Wildlife Trust, organised by John McGregor. Katie also exchanged ideas with council horticulturalist Paul Fealey on wildlife-friendly plantings at other sites as well as Glen Goyle – as the DWT is keen to work in partnership with the local authority. Meanwhile, John has been sorting funding and siting for bird and bat boxes as suggested by Katie.

As well as the Sampson and Belmont connections, Glen Goyle has other interesting historical ties. There was yet another visit in June – from the Bassett family who are very much associated with the parkland, which at one time was the garden to the former Asherton House. There's a lot more on those connections in a recent tour of Asherton Gardens and more on the history of one distinct corner of the Glen, aka The 'Near' and 'Far' Lawns at Glen Goyle – all on the FOGG website.

There have been a few gaps along the Glen where once upon a time there were benches – and after research into possible 'suitable' replacements by FOGG, the District Council has installed two new benches, made from UK recycled plastic waste, but with a smart, traditional look for these Victorian gardens.

These have now been made available 'for adoption' as memorial benches – and anyone can apply to the council to make a request, which is very straightforward. So, do get in touch before they go!

Finally, John McGregor has also been busy with applying for further investment for the Glen – and his work has paid off. A local charitable trust has now provided a very generous grant for new plants – which the FOGG working party will be digging in over the coming months as we re-enter the planting season.

There should be plenty of activity happening along the Glen over the coming months as volunteers continue to enhance the wildlife of a very special place – “the wonderful Glen Goyle” as Katie of the DWT called it.

Anyone can join Friends of Glen Goyle to volunteer on Thursday mornings as part of the enthusiastic and welcoming working party

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All in all, a year in which we have continued to make progress, but not without its frustrations. The volunteers would like to thank Vision Group of Sidmouth for supporting us with a wonderful website, insurance, and project liaison. Thanks you!

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