

*Matters of Interest***BORTHWICK PARK**

The Hon. R.B. MARTIN (15:22): Borthwick Park, the green heart of Kensington, is situated between Thornton and Bridge Streets. Over the past 14 years, it has been impressively transformed through a mighty community revegetation effort driven by the dedicated members of the Kensington Residents' Association.

In 2009, this group of passionate local residents approached the Norwood Payneham & St Peters council to start the Borthwick Park Biodiversity Project. This project was designed to revegetate and restore the park from a largely grassed area, with the creek section also hosting a number of introduced and pest plant species, into a lush and varied pre-settlement landscape populated by native plants and trees.

The Kensington Residents' Association partnered with the council and the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board to achieve their ambitious aims. The community working bees have been held since 2009, with the first plantings commencing the following year. Through the dedicated and ongoing efforts of local volunteers led by the residents' association, the project has been a resounding success, but by no means have their efforts ceased. It is an ongoing project and their passion and commitment to the cause have remained strong over time.

Visiting Borthwick Park today, you would not imagine what it once looked like. It has been transformed into a beautiful, peaceful and strikingly verdant community green space that is greatly enjoyed by so many people. Borthwick Park now provides a habitat for a thriving array of native birdlife and hosts prolific pollinators. At least 11 native bird species are known to call the park home, with a further nine species having been observed to visit the space.

The park also offers ample opportunity for public enjoyment, having two small playgrounds, along with great spots for people to picnic, exercise or simply enjoy the ambience on a park bench. There is even a volunteer shed with tools and equipment, including a defibrillator, to ensure that volunteers in the park are safe and well supplied.

Borthwick Park's design is centred around a number of magnificent pre-settlement river red gums, some of which are dated to over 400 years old. They are a fitting centrepiece for the new landscape that seeks to restore elements of the native environment before Kensington was surveyed and settled in the earliest days of the colony. Choosing the right native plants for the area has always been at the centre of the project, and a great deal of time was put into an appropriate plan for the park.

Focus on increasing biodiversity, with low plants and ground covers to keep the weeds at bay, is a current priority as this will reduce the need for volunteers to be constantly weeding. Speaking of volunteers, in 2022 there were 20 working bees in the park, with over 600 plants put in the ground—a truly formidable effort.

On a recent tour of the park, hosted by the Kensington Residents' Association President, Mr Roger Bryson, and the person who initiated and led the biodiversity project, Mr John Legg, I was able to witness firsthand the amazing transformation that has taken place in this historic park. What a job they have done, so much so that John Legg and Andrew Dyson were awarded the 2023 Citizen and Active Citizen of the Year respectively by the Norwood Payneham & St Peters council at an Australia Day ceremony that I was fortunate to attend.

The residents' association recognises that not only is biodiversity important to the survival and wellbeing of plant and animal species native to the Adelaide Plains but it is a key priority for local residents as well, as has been identified through council surveys. The work of the residents' association has supported this priority admirably, inspiring and assisting members of the Kensington community to get involved in increasing local biodiversity not only by engaging them as volunteers in the park project but also by providing advice and assistance for local residents wishing to rehabilitate their own gardens to a more natural and native state.

This in turn supports the efforts of the community in creating and supporting biodiversity in Borthwick Park, offering more habitat space and more food for native birds, flying foxes, bees and plenty of other species within the local ecosystems. The association and their local volunteers continue to improve Borthwick Park. They also recognise and respect the important work that this park plays in the life of the community. I understand they are also organising a multicultural fair in the coming months, and they regularly seek to engage and involve local people in their activities.

I wholeheartedly commend all that the Kensington Residents' Association has done for Borthwick Park in the service of local improvements to biodiversity and to human wellbeing. It is inspiring to witness the benefits to their community and its natural environment that their passion has delivered.