**Chairman’s Progress Report August 2021**

This has been another exciting year for wellbeing@garonpark, while also being an extremely challenging one. The excitement is driven by a number of key developments:

* The appointment of Mark Stanley as Operations Manager, Caroline Reynolds as Commercial Development Manager and Kay Blackman as Community Engagement Officer. These roles will be vital as we seek to engage with the local community and to ensure that our operation is safe, well run and sustainable. Mark, Caroline and Kay bring a wealth of relevant experience and will be excellent additions to the team. They have already made a noticeable difference to the effectiveness and pace of our operation.
* The opening of the Outdoor Gym. The gym is now ready to use, sited across two locations on the edge of the Wellbeing Trail.
* The opening of the Playground, which is already being well-used.
* The opening of the Nature School Resource Centre. This is an excellent and well provisioned facility that will support learning and engagement activity in the Nature School Area.
* We have installed the Pond, Sensory Garden and Herbie. The Sensory Garden includes seating which make it an excellent area for contemplation.
* In the Community Garden, the raised beds and trugs have been installed and are in use and the Polytunnel is nearing completion.
* A portable gazebo is now in use as part of the Garon Park Shed offer. This allows additional numbers to use the shed and helps address some the restrictions brought about by COVID.
* Delivery of our Planting Plan continues. We are fortunate to continue to have the opportunity to work with Liam King of Writtle College in developing a plan that enhances the beauty and biodiversity of the Garon Park site and reflects national and local government guidelines. We have now planted c. 3,500 hedgerows and trees on site.

Many organisations and volunteers have helped us with these projects, so many that is difficult to list them all. However, our major supporters have been:

* Big Lottery
* Veolia Environmental Trust
* Southend Borough Council
* Southend Public Health
* Southend Emergency Fund
* Essex Community Foundation
* Essex & Suffolk Water
* Garfield Weston
* Hivedome
* Ford
* EASST
* The Carbon Trust

and we thank them all for their help.

Alongside these important developments we have shaped our plans for the Gazebo Seating Areas and Orchard.

Lin Boulter continues to be a vital player in shaping the operation and ethos at Garon Park. Lucy Stanley continues her outstanding fund-raising work, where she maintains an enviable success rate.

We have faced a number of challenges. Sadly, the firm we engaged to deliver the Oak Gazebos has gone bust and we have lost some of the funds we raised as a result. We are assessing the way forward on this.

An on-going challenge is that with the delivery of our facilities we now turn our attention to developing real and lasting engagement with the local community. Without this, the benefits of wellbeing will not become available to local people. This is a key area of focus for us.

Our Board is small but hard working. The need to attract further Trustees to the Board with a variety of complementary skills is a priority moving forward. We also need to ensure the board is more reflective of the Southend community. We are fortunate to have had Carol Carr join us as a trustee.

We have been fortunate in the support that we have received so far from a variety of funders. However, we need to look at how we ensure that wellbeing@garonpark becomes financially self-sustaining over the coming years. The balance between accessibility for the local community and revenue generation will be difficult to strike but we need to find a way.

Finally, no list of challenges could fail to include the impact of COVID-19. With our other partners that use the Garon Park site we have emerged from the restrictions fit and ready to serve the local community. Lin Boulter has played a vital role in guiding us back to a form of normality.

It is 5 years since wellbeing@garonpark came into being. Together, we have achieved much so far. I am sure that, with your help, we will achieve our aim of “providing sustainable facilities that can be used to improve local health and wellbeing, as well as enhancing the beauty, biodiversity and environmental value of the 30-acre Garon Park site in Southend on Sea” in the years to come.

**Andy Badger**

**Chairman wellbeing@garonpark**