

Waterlow Park: people in the park. Spring 2011 (2011 survey report).

On a sunny, Sunday afternoon in March, when the park was filled with visitors, we asked people if they would fill in a short questionnaire. The purpose was to find out how they used the Park and what suggestions they had, if any, for improvements. This was a self completed questionnaire and people were free to record whatever comments they had. One hundred and two people completed the survey.

Use of the Park

The majority of people said they visited the Park once a week or more (52%); a fifth, (20%), visited once or more a month and 26% visited occasionally. A few people said it was the first time they had visited this Park (4).

People came to the Park for different reasons, sometimes several different reasons at the same time. Commonly, to bring their children or their dogs and to enjoy the natural environment and the playgrounds. Often, the people with children said they had also been to the café in Lauderdale House. The single, most common reason people gave for coming to the Park was that they were 'just enjoying the park'. (75%). A third (32) said they came to bring their children, 27 said they came to look at the wildlife and a further twenty nine (29) said they had also visited Lauderdale House. This was usually for refreshment but a few people had come into the Park after attending a function there. Seven people had been playing tennis, three had been to the Park Centre and three were en route to visit the Cemetery. One person was crossing the Park to get to Swains Lane.*
(* Numbers here do not add up to 102 because people gave several different answers to this question.)

The majority of people lived locally. A quarter (25) from Highgate; a quarter (25) from Haringey; usually from Hornsey Lane or Crouch End. A similar proportion came from Islington (28). Six people lived in Barnet. The remainder came from further afield, some as far as York and Essex but several from other London Boroughs like Brent, Kensington and Ealing. .

The majority of written comments and suggestions were about the facilities in the Park (38). They covered the playgrounds, the café, the tennis courts, the aviary and the ponds.

FACILITIES IN THE PARK

Playgrounds (8)

Comments about the two playgrounds focused mainly on developing and extending these facilities. Suggestions included better and more apparatus like climbing frames and swings for older children. One person suggested a space for 'baby related activities.'

Aviary (7)

Suggestions about the aviary were all requests to 'bring back the birds' One person said that there was little point in visiting the park now that the aviary had gone. On the subject of birds, one person said that the bird feeders should be kept filled

Ponds (4)

A few people said that they would like access to the ponds so that their children could feed the ducks. One person felt that there should be access for dogs to swim and a fourth said that access to the upper pond should be clearer; ... *Like the upper pond but access is confusing. It needs better signage and an introduction and information about the wildlife etc and hours of opening.*

Café (Lauderdale). (3)

Parents (often mothers) who brought their children to the Park also visited the Lauderdale House café. Suggestions were made for expansion of this facility, for baby changing facilities and for cheaper food and drinks.

Tennis (3)

One person mentioned that the courts could be improved, another that table tennis facilities could be introduced. A third person suggested that a putting green would be good.

Various single comments

Other suggestions made included restoration of the drinking fountain, more statues, removal of dead flowers from the memorial benches, better signage, and a reduction in the amount of vandalism.

EVENTS (19)

Many suggestions were made for events people would like to have in the Park. The largest number(12) was for musical events including outdoor concerts, concerts on Sundays and one person suggested rock and roll concerts. Other suggestions were for tree walks, summer fetes, Easter egg hunts, a scooter race, open air theatre, food growing sessions and more events for children. Three people wanted more information and educational events about wildlife and trees.

HORTICULTURE (9)

Many compliments were offered for the way in which the Park is cared for but a few people wrote that they felt too many trees and shrubs were cut down. One person wanted 'more flowers' and another missed 'the rhododendrons down by the lake'. But more compliments were offered than criticisms.

LOVE the PARK (30)

The suggestions described above were outweighed by the number of people who wrote that they loved the Park as it is. These comments were much stronger than the suggestions offered for improvement, and there were more of them. One person said; *I couldn't live in London without this Park.* Another said, *Leave it as it is. It's very charming and undisturbed.* These kinds of comments were made by half the people who wrote in the space for comments. Words like *peaceful, lovely, fantastic, and perfect* were regularly used. There is always room for improvement of course, but there is little doubt that Waterlow Park is appreciated by those who use it.

(70 people made these suggestions: 32 people offered no comments)

Conclusion

This is the third survey of the people who use Waterlow Park, carried out by the Friends, in the past 18 months. Because we asked different questions for different purposes each time, direct comparisons can't be made. But a few things are clear from each of the three surveys.

The Park is used regularly by local people. They use it to walk their dogs, bring their children to play and to learn about nature, and just to relax. It attracts some people from further afield who also appreciate its beauty. Whilst individuals appreciate the facilities provided (tennis courts, playgrounds and the café at Lauderdale House), the overwhelming use and appreciation is for the Park itself: for the trees, the flowers, the wildlife, the views and the care of natural resources provided.

A recent Government report from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs put the value of green spaces to human well being at £290 per household per year.... Although most of us would not value Waterlow Park in these terms, the cuts in Park budgets in Camden (currently £300,000 over three years), makes it necessary to point out the danger to our green spaces. One way to protect the Park, its beauty and our own and our children's well being, would be to join the Friends). Collectively we are more likely to influence spending on natural resources and to save our local environment.

www.waterlowpark.org.uk