

AGM: 25th May 2017: Report from the Committee

Overview

A year in two halves: the first few months were spent delivering and then recovering from our wonderful **Lark in the Park** event in September which celebrated the 125th anniversary of the park's opening in 1891. The second half has been business as usual with a focus still on the future management of the Park, its funding, properties and the grounds maintenance contract renewal. The whole committee has worked very hard providing support on many different aspects of park life as this report shows and the horticultural volunteers led by Patricia Walby and April Cameron are really making the park look good and park users tell us this.

Relations with Camden and the future of the park

FoWP is a key member of the newly set up Waterlow Park Trust Advisory Group [TAG]. This now has an interim chair and is clarifying its strategy. A key dimension of its work is to plan a fundraising strategy for the park as council funding will continue to decline and ways of replacing this need to be found. There will also still be a role for the FoWP outside the WPC as the key "voice" of park users.

FoWP continues to work closely with Camden Parks department and attends quarterly meetings of the Camden Friends groups. Specific areas where there are regular meetings between the Friends and officers include tree works, and horticultural work. The Friends also work closely with the Head Gardener, who is a real asset to the park.

FoWP also works with other groups of Friends across London, through the London Friends of Green Spaces Network (LFGN). These meetings offer the opportunity to exchange news and share good practice. Recently we discussed campaigns to raise awareness of the extent of problems facing Parks in London and planned a national conference, to discuss the situation. We also attended the meetings of the Select Committee on Parks which reported in January this year. All these activities add value to our work and ultimately, to the continued beauty of the Park. Christine Farrell is our lead on these matters.

The properties in Waterlow Park

The privately rented lodges continue to be held by the same families. The rent continues to be ring-fenced for the park. A significant amount will be used to pay back Camden council for the monies used to turn the properties into lettable dwellings. After about 8 years all monies will flow into the park funds. The Park Centre has now been let to LUX - an organisation of the moving image and this will also make an important contribution to park funds. All three properties will reduce costs as the utility and council tax charges will be met by the tenants.

Lauderdale House has now re-opened after Camden and the Heritage Lottery Fund helped finance its new education block and refurbishment. Lauderdale House now has to meet all its future renovation and maintenance costs as Camden will no longer be responsible for this – another long-term saving.

Horticulture and volunteering

It's been another successful year for the horticultural group. Last summer, drawing on the expertise of retired primary head teachers in Highgate, we worked with all six local primary schools using the park's 125th anniversary as a topic to deliver sizeable chunks of the Key Stages 1 & 2 in the national curriculum. One of the children's projects was to grow sunflower seeds in the classroom and transplant them into a spectacular sunflower plantation in the kitchen garden. It was rewarding to see children bringing their families to the kitchen garden to show off their sunflower which by August had reached the towering height of 2-3 metres.

Last year Camden awarded the horticultural volunteers a plot of land in the park to use as a nursery. Late summer was spent levelling the ground, moving a very heavy shed (thanks to some young blood community effort) and constructing a polytunnel. This has paid dividends in enabling us to grow plants and bulbs for sale without the risk of squirrel attack, and supply the head gardener with plants for the park – plants that would have been too expensive to provide from commercial nurseries. Meanwhile the borders and beds and Swain's Lane Lodge, planted up last year, continue to develop well.

Our band of volunteers has been small but very committed with their numbers occasionally swelled by classes from Capel Manor and corporate teams from the city. This year we are also hosting a Highgate School community group who will be creating a new sunflower plantation.

Projects this year include developing the back of the park centre into a medicinal garden and helping Lauderdale House develop the spaces left empty following the building work.

Over the year we have also been working together with other Highgate institutions, in particular the cemetery and the Harington Scheme.

After seven years Patricia Walby, who began the horticultural volunteer programme is standing down. She is hoping that members will appoint April Cameron, her teacher at Capel Manor and former head of garden design and horticulture at the college, to succeed her.

The Community Orchard

Since being planted in February 2013 the Orchard has flourished and is looking very healthy and verdant. Last year Louise Lewis gifted us a Stella Cherry to replace one that had been damaged by a dog attack, and we can report that it has settled well and blossomed beautifully in its first year.

In the summer we pruned a couple of the stone fruits, removing a long central leader from the Damson. It was fruiting about 3 metres from the ground which made it impossible to pick. Hopefully the tree will bush out more. In the winter we pruned some of the apples, most notably the Core Blimey (tree 4), the Tydeman Late Orange (tree 6), and the Greensleeves (tree 8) - all to improve their shape. Apple trees are ideally pruned to a wine glass shape to encourage fruiting in an open space in the middle of the tree.

Most of the trees have blossomed well, and this year, our fifth season, we are hoping to actually sample some fruit at the end of the summer. Very little of the fruit which did grow last year survived the squirrels and birds, or the mischievous hands of strangers. The Orchard has its own web-site at www.waterlowparkorchard.org.uk and occasionally tweets @WaterlowPkOrchd

Kitchen Garden

In 2016 Camden formally transferred the management of the Kitchen Garden to all ten community groups. A meeting was held in October to agree a constitution and to elect officers. Matt Collins was elected Chair with supporting secretary and treasurer. Sadly, Matt had to resign as Chair in May this year, because he has moved away from the area. A meeting will be held soon to elect another Chair. A replacement has been found to take over his plot.

Last autumn some of the turf at the side of the plots was removed and wild flower seeds sown. School children led by Patricia, and April planted sunflowers in the spaces at the bottom of the site. They looked wonderful throughout last summer. We entered the Kitchen Garden in the London Open Gardens weekend in June. This publicity meant that we had visitors from all over London, some from other parts of the United Kingdom and several from abroad.

The Kitchen Garden has been an amazing success since it opened seven years ago. Started as a food growing initiative when Shaun Kiddell was the Camden Officer responsible for Parks, it has achieved a community of gardeners who have produced some remarkable flowers and vegetables over the seasons. This community includes two primary schools, a children's nursery and several local gardening groups. It has never been vandalised, nor, as far as we know, has any of the produce been stolen. It really does make an invaluable contribution, to an already beautiful Park.

Trees, Views and Maintenance issues

Responsibility for trees and views this year was taken on by Louise Lewis after Ian Henghes, left the committee. We work closely with Camden Council. Some new trees have been planted and we have been able to ensure they are planted in appropriate spots. We have also made our own suggestions as to which tree species we would like to see.

We are working closely with the Waterlow Trust Advisory Group Trees and Views group and . trying to challenge Camden's blanket trees policy, for all the borough, of only planting native trees. We would prefer more flexibility in the case of Waterlow Park which is known for both its 'park trees' and its exotic trees. We would like to see greater diversity in the tree planting to preserve this variety. Similarly we are trying to persuade Camden to allow greater tree management in order to preserve and enhance views. We have regular walkabouts, with and without Camden officers and continue to monitor the parks trees and views.

The TCV Conservation Volunteers continue to contribute to the ground maintenance in the park, working principally in the nature areas around the top and lower ponds.

Wildlife

Work on developing wildlife initiatives has been on hold this year as work on setting up TAG and Lark in the Park have absorbed much of our time

Sport

FoWP has long wanted to develop a strategy for sport in the park, but we are still unable to put any real resources to this. Among the things we would like to see are more productive use of the tennis courts which encourages children and young people to use the courts and therefore the park more. We would also like a discrete outdoor gym and a petanque course has already been prosed by some park users. Coolhurst tennis club continues to hire some courts to run tennis for children but it is not clear to what extent this is helping meet our aim of getting underprivileged children doing sport.

There are also some maintenance issues which need to be resolved. Until we attract some one onto the committee willing to take forward the sports interest, little will happen.

125 Anniversary of the public opening of the Park - Lark in the Park

2016 was Waterlow Park's 125th Birthday and we wanted to be sure it was a year to remember. We created a series of events during 2016 with the theme *Waterlow125*, leading up to a grand 'village fete' in the Park to echo the original opening event in 1891.

The year started with a *Park Life*- themed amateur photography competition. 12 winning images were published in FoWP's first calendar. A commemorative mug also went on sale. An ambitious history and nature programme was created for local primary schools. The children created plays about the Waterlow family, grew sunflowers from seed and planted them in the Kitchen Garden and also wrote poems and drew pictures about the Park's destiny. Sir Christopher Waterlow and local historian Pam Cooper gave talks to the schools.

The *Lark in the Park* in September was the 'birthday party' for the Waterlow125 Anniversary. The park was transformed with marquees housing food and beer stalls, village stalls for cakes and bric a brac, shies and games a mini farm and donkey rides. Our headline sponsor was Goldschmidt and Howland and Big Lottery Fund, Camden Council, Ernest Cook Trust and the Stationers' Community Fund also generously underwrote the event. Schools, volunteers and local businesses also made valuable contributions in kind..

The *fete* was opened by TV star Paul Whitehouse together with VIPs whose forbears were at the original park opening: Lord Avebury, descendant of Sir John Lubbock (LCC Chairman), Cllr Nadia Shah, the Mayor of Camden, (now the park's managers) Mr Michael Welbank , MBE, Chief Commoner of the City of London, (representing the Lord Mayor), Mr Ian H Bennett, Master of the Worshipful Company of Stationers and Sir Christopher Waterlow whose great x 3 grandfather, Sir Sydney had been Lord Mayor and Master of the Stationers Company and 52 Waterlows came from around the globe to join the celebrations.

All day activity included a Mad Hatter's Tea Party by Lauderdale House and the school children's excellent plays, plus music by the North London Brass Band, Highgate Choral Society and Pearly 'royalty'. A fitting tribute to our Waterlow Park 'garden for the gardenless'.

Communications - Website and social media

Along with direct mailings, the website www.waterlowpark.org.uk continues to be our main channel of communication with members and Park users. This was particularly vital over the past 12 months to provide information on developments in the Park, to promote events connected with the celebrations for 125 years of the Park and to sell the calendars and mugs produced to mark the occasion. The calendar featured the winners of the photographic competition organised as part of Waterlow 125. This was sold in local shops as well as online .. The website also has an active twitter feed focusing on current images and information.

The committee also produces occasional newsletters which are emailed to supporters but this and the web are areas of activity that need developing and the committee hopes that someone with relevant knowledge may come forward to replace the person who filled this role during part of the past year who has now moved away from the area.

Follow us on Twitter @WaterlowPark and @WaterlowPkOrchd. The Park also now has a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/waterlowpark).

Events

The past year was dominated by preparations for the major September 2016 *Lark in the Park* event but smaller scale activities also took place throughout the period. Some of these have become regular fixtures such as participating in the Highgate Fair and Open Garden Squares Weekend in June. We also held two trail and explorer afternoons where children and adults are encouraged to identify natural or historical features within the Park. We make efforts to have a presence at regular and one-off local events such as the farmers' markets at St Josephs, St Michael's fete and the Heritage Fair at the newly reopened Lauderdale House.

Special events this year included a very successful Bat Walk in September, a well-attended fundraising classical concert in Dyne House together with the Friends of the Harington Scheme in June, bulb and plant sales, as well as the many horticulture-linked activities covered elsewhere.

FoWP- The organisation, membership and publicity

We continue to have more than 200 members and have more than 400 people on the mailing list. Increasingly people are setting up direct debits, which helps maintain numbers. We have also received many donations which is most encouraging. So our offer of different ways to pay has begun to work

The committee this year comprised: Marcia Beer [secretary], Robin Cartwright [trees and views]', Christine Farrell [co-chair], Louise Lewis [membership and trees], Fiona Brown [press and PR], Ceridwen Roberts [co-chair] Richard Shipman [Treasurer] and Patricia Walby [horticulture] Christine Farrell, Patricia Walby and Mel Manhine are standing down and in all there are four vacancies.. Two people are putting their names forward for the committee; April Cameron, who has been working with Patricia and the horticultural volunteers and Shona Paton who is a regular park user with her children and helped with Lark in the Park We are looking for two more people to join the committee We are particularly keen to recruit someone from the committee from south of the Park as this area is still not represented on the Committee.

All the committee deserve our thanks for combining their work for FoWP with busy domestic lives and day jobs.

Future plans

We are looking at 2017/2018 with some hope of being able to tackle some of the areas of park life which had to be put on hold while we struggled with setting up the Waterlow Park Trust Advisory Group and worked to deliver Lark in the Park. This includes sorting out the mound. The need to tackle the funding gap for the Park will present us with new challenges and we also would like to do more activities with children and young people.

Do support us to do this.

Ceridwen Roberts

Co -Chair, FoWP on behalf of the committee

17th May 2017